CULTURAL POLITICS:
DISCORD AND FACTIONALISM IN NEW CALEDONIA, 1991 TO 1993

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focusses on the activities of a group of young French people staying in a hostel in Nouméa from 1991 to 1993. It draws on my fieldwork in Nouméa and Maré in the Loyalty Islands of New Caledonia.

The main part of the thesis looks at the interactions of this group of young people with other ethnic and social groups living in New Caledonia. These include the Kanaks, the "Caldoches" (native-born Caledonians of French origin), the "Métros" (immigrants from metropolitan France), Pacific islanders, Vietnamese and Indonesians. The thesis also includes a short section describing Maré itself and my fieldwork there.

Particular attention is paid to the Kanaks and to the Caldoches, whose rural and urban lifestyles are compared and contrasted to those of the young people being studied. Relations between these young people, newly arrived in the French Pacific, and those of the colony's established inhabitants, allow themes of globalization, travel, knowledge, reflexivity and alterity to be explored vis-à-vis anthropological theory. Kanak behaviour, towards Kanaks and others, is shown to relate to ideas of knowledge, power, gender and hierarchy, prevalent in both Polynesia and Melanesia.

The work is underpinned by explanations of, and references to, the international and local historical and geographical context of New Caledonian social and political behaviour. It attempts to show the bitter disputes and resentments arising between ethnic groups. It discusses civil unrest, the Kanaks' desire for independence, and some possible economic and social consequences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Too many people have directly and indirectly helped me to complete this thesis for me to be able to thank them all. Professor Joanna Overing and the late Professor Alfred Gell, my academic supervisors at the London School of Economics, were both extremely kind and patient towards me, despite the many demands which I made upon their time and generosity. Dr Peter Loizos, Dr James Woodburn, other members of staff, and my fellow students have also helped me. In particular, I should like to thank Mark Jamieson, Leonie Kindness, Louise Perrotta, Paul Oldham, Ali Murat Yel, and all members of the Writing-Up Seminar. I greatly appreciated the detailed comments and advice given to me by Professor Joanna Overing, Dr Felicia Hughes-Freeland, and Dr David McKnight, enabling me to produce the final version of this thesis.

In France and New Caledonia, I was grateful for the advice and assistance of the members of the "Etudes des sociétés kanak" group, and of many other people, in Maré, Lifou, and Nouméa.

Above all, I must thank my parents and brothers for their continuing love and support, without which this thesis would not have been written.

The Economic and Social Research Council, the (French) Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, the University of London Central Research Fund, the Scholarships Office of the University of London, and the Scholarships Office of the London School of Economics and Political Science, were generous in their financial aid. Needless to say, any errors or shortcomings are mine alone.

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NOTES ON NOMENCLATURE AND TRANSLATION

In the text I use various terms to describe the different ethnic and social groups in New Caledonia. These terms are intended to be as value-free as possible, given the need for clarity, although I have tried to respect people's sensibilities.

Caldoches has an ambivalent status, being resented as an ugly vulgarity by some, who prefer the term Caledonians, "calédoniens", but being adopted by others, who use it as a badge of identity. in this case, I use it to indicate those Caledonians of largely French descent who were born and bred in the territory.

Caledonians describes all the inhabitants of New Caledonia who were born and bred there, plus those immigrants who have consciously adopted it as their own country. Caledonians includes Caldoches, Vietnamese, Pacific Islanders, etcetera. It usually does not include Kanaks, except in particular contexts.

Europeans describes white people, whose physical appearance is European as opposed to Kanak, Polynesian, Asiatic, etcetera. European can therefore include the Caldoches as well as the Métros, and Europeans of non-French origin.

Hostellers applies to those people resident at the Nouméa hostel, simply because other words or phrases appeared too cumbersome. The hostellers often referred to themselves as the people from the hostel, "les gens de l'auberge", but I felt that something simpler was needed.

Kanaks describes the indigenous inhabitants of New Caledonia. It is used collectively as with Kanak culture, Kanak society, when focussing on common elements, although it is possible to argue that the differing Melanesian language groups and high chiefships of New Caledonia constitute a series of micro-cultures and micro-societies. Before the independence movement became established, the term Kanak was seen as an insult. Now its formal use indicates pro-independence sympathies, while Melanesians, "mélanésiens", is often seen as indicating the opposite, a desire to retain links with France.

Melanesians describes people from Melanesia, including Kanaks, but also Vanuatans, Papuans, etcetera.

Métros ("métropolitains") is the neutral term used by Caledonians for people from metropolitan France, originally contrasting "métropolitains" with "colonials". The vulgar term is "les z'oreilles".

Pacific Islanders usually refers to immigrants from Wallis, Futuna, Tahiti, and elsewhere in French Polynesia, and Vanuatu, but can mean all the island inhabitants of the Pacific, depending on context.

Polynesians refers to Pacific Islanders from Polynesia.

Village describes Kanak villages but in New Caledonia the most popular word, with all parties, is tribe, "la tribu". Villages are generally identical with tribal homes. For historical reasons, given the crowding of Kanaks on to reservations, this is more problematic on the mainland, la Grande Terre, than on the Loyalty Islands. "La tribu" carries no derogatory meanings. I have used tribe throughout the text simply to distinguish Kanak tribes from New Caledonia's several ethnic groups (Kanaks, Tahitians, Vietnamese etcetera).

Translation. Except when stated otherwise, all translations are mine.

Identities. Informants' names and other identifying details have been changed.

LIST AND ABBREVIATIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND ORGANIZATIONS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

AICLF

Association des Indigènes Calédoniens, Amis de la Liberté dans l'Ordre

Association of Caledonian Natives, Friends of Freedom through Order

FLNKS

Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste

Front for Kanak and Socialist National Liberation

FLP (later known as Tavini Huiraatira)

Front de Libération de la Polynésie

Polynesian Liberation Front

Foulards Rouges (later known as LKS)

Red Scarves

Front National

National Front

FULK

Front Uni de Libération Kanak et Socialiste

United Front for Kanak Socialist Liberation

LKS

Libération Kanak Socialiste

Kanak Socialist Liberation

MOP

Mouvement pour l'Ordre et la Paix

Movement for Order and Peace

OAS

Organisation de l'Armée Secrète

Secret Army Organization

PALIKA

Parti de Libération Kanak

Kanak Liberation Party

RPCR

Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République

Gathering for French Republican New Caledonia

Tavini Huiraatira

A Tahitian independence party (translation not available).

Formerly known as FLP.

UC

Union Calédonienne

Caledonian Union

UICALO

Union des Indigènes Calédoniens et Loyaltiens Français

Union of Indigenous French Caledonians and Loyalty Islanders

UO

Union Océanienne .

Oceanist Union

USTKE

Union Syndicale des Travailleurs Kanaks et des Exploités

Trades Union Syndicate of Kanak Workers and of Exploitees

PREFACE

"The Tao of which we speak is not the real Tao"[1] and the multiplicity of words spilling upon these pages cannot recreate the real feelings and sensations of life in Maré and Nouméa. But I have done my best to give an impression of what fieldwork was like and to convey the sensations and colours of everyday life. As Marion Milner puts it, in On Not Being Able To Paint ((1950) 1986: 139-140) "...the artist, by embodying the experience of illusion, provides the essential basis for realising, making real, for feeling, as well as knowing, the external world ... art creates nature, including human nature...real life is always more full, richer, potentially, than the experience of any art because... it is through art that we can come nearer to realising this fullness and richness."

Max Weber wrote that academic interpretation is essentially an artistic process (" 'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", 1949: 90-112). But the use of local colour, and the personal references in this thesis are not intended primarily as literary exercises in reflexivity but as clarification to the text. To quote Michel Leiris, by writing, I increase the value of my testimony, by showing that at every moment I know on what to base my value as a witness, "...écrivant subjectivement, j'augmente la valeur de mon témoignage, en montrant qu'à chaque instant je sais à quoi m'en tenir sur ma valeur de témoin." (L'Afrique fantôme

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1 "The Tao of which we speak is not the real Tao": opening phrase to Lao Tzu's Tao te Ching in Milner (1950) 1986:162.

(1934) 1988:263). This thesis tells two interweaving stories, one of fieldwork in Maré, the other of Nouméa. My original project, a Kanak village ethnography in Maré, had to be abandoned. It was gradually replaced by a study of young people staying in a hostel in Nouméa.

These two fieldwork stories, Maré, and Nouméa, show how the personal really is political. Historically grounded economic and political processes are manifested through individual and collective experiences: my own experiences, those of the Kanaks, the hostellers, and others.

The theme and title of this thesis are Cultural Politics .... Questions of power and identity are looked at from several different perspectives: from the outside, by the hostellers and anthropologist; from the inside, by the Kanaks and Caldoches. I have tried to give as complete a picture as possible, to give a sense of what New Caledonia was like.

The first part of this work deals with the historical background to some of New Caledonia's ongoing problems. It is a truism that understanding the present depends on understanding the past: the question is how does something represent itself to itself, how does the present make us create the past? The analysis of social change depends on historical knowledge: the days of functionalist "timeless" ethnographies are over. One reason for their prevalence was the difficulty of constructing reliable historical accounts within non-technical, non-literate societies, such as the Kanaks', where

myth and history blurred into one.

History is essential to the understanding of New Caledonia not only because of social change but because it was written by the victors. It is the story of unequal forces: the ancient, socially complex but technically simple, non-literate Kanak society was irredeemably altered by conquest and subjugation to the literate, materially superior, sophisticated French. All ethnographies, histories, official and unofficial discourses in or about New Caledonia refer to this inequality, implying a division between civilization and barbarism. Such ideas are nothing new and can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. It is only by recognizing the problematic nature of these accounts that it is possible to shift perspective and try to arrive, if not at a probably unattainable truth, at possible alternative versions.

History in New Caledonia, as elsewhere, is used as an ideological charter to legitimize power struggles and collective identities. Its emphases depend on the concerns of the day - when I was in New Caledonia these were the independence movement and the forthcoming 1998 referendum on independence. New Caledonia's different ethnic groups, their general endo-sociality and endogamy, maintain boundaries within which self-definition can flourish and other groups be stigmatized. People know what they are by seeing what they are not: representations and typologies are used to reassure themselves and reject others. Questions and deconstructions are seen as indicating lack of solidarity. [This

theme is repeated throughout the thesis, from Parts 2 to 4.]

Memory is associated with historical knowledge, especially as it influences visitors to, rather than residents of, New Caledonia. Parts 3 and 4 of the thesis look at tourists and travellers in New Caledonia, and especially at Western attitudes towards travel and the Kanaks. It has often been said that the First World War introduced the modern age by the sense of fragmentation brought about by death and devastation on such a vast scale; and that later tourism and travel, with their continuing stress on what has been called "wilful nostalgia" and "authenticity" are really attempts to regain a sense of shattered wholeness.

This may well be true of Europe, and, possibly, some parts of the United States and former European colonies: but it is not true of New Caledonia. However shaken its inhabitants may have been by the colossal destruction and fighting on French soil, New Caledonia was a long way off; even if some of its patriotic citizens had volunteered to fight. Most of the remaining inhabitants of New Caledonia had already had their lives damaged to such an extent that a distant war was unlikely to harm them. The shameful pasts of convicts, impoverished immigrants, indentured labourers and dispossessed Kanaks, and their stigmatized descendants, was enough to prevent most people from sentimentality. The only real Caledonian nostalgia I ever came across was expressed by members of Nouméa's urban élite for the period before "les événements" and for "le temps des américains": in other

words, the Second World War and its aftermath, when New Caledonia experienced unparalleled excitement and prosperity, before the violent unrest of the 1980s.

This is not to say that myths of "wholeness" did not exist; one example is personified in the Caledonian Tonton Marcel cartoons of Bernard Berger (Chapter 20). The question of Caledonian identity is discussed in detail in Part 4; it shows that such nostalgia is a form of selective memory, used to justify Caldoche political ascendancy.

Past and present representations and typologies, including anthropology's representations of ethnographers, appear throughout the thesis: but particularly in Parts 3 and 4. Part 3, on the hostellers, looks at why people travel and tackles Western fascination with the exotic. Part 4 concentrates on the town of Nouméa and local politics. It shows the reactions of the hostellers, marginalized outsiders, to some of the Territory's different ethnic groups, particularly the Kanaks and the Caldoches. It also looks at the Kanaks' and Caldoches' representations of and relationships with each other, and with other groups, in their jockeying for power and socio-economic status, before the 1998 referendum on independence.

Part 1 (Chapters 1-5) is report rather than exegesis. It describes the geography and economy of New Caledonia and its history from the time of the first European contact to the early 1990s. New Caledonia forms part of the Melanesian/Polynesian cultural overlap and was once settled

by the Lapita people. This is discussed along with what is known of ancient pre-contact Kanak society, its disruption by European conquest, and its survival into the present day.

Captain Cook's 1774 discovery of New Caledonia was followed by further European exploration, then by trade, settlement. and missionization. France's annexation of the territory in 1853 was partly to prevent it being seized by Britain or Germany and partly to establish a new penal colony, to rid France of criminal, political, and other anti-social elements.

This meant that, from the very beginning of colonization, New Caledonia displayed huge discrepancies of wealth and status, not just between Kanaks and others, but between Europeans. The early sandalwood, Melanesian contract labour ("blackbirding"), and other traders used their wealth to diversify into other activities such as agriculture, coffee-growing, cattle-raising and nickel-mining. All these enabled them to consolidate their grip on the economy, and form a social and political élite far above the great mass of their employees: convict, immigrant, and imported indentured labourers.

New Caledonia's population began to include New Hebridean, Polynesian, Indochinese and other Asiatic labourers, most of whom worked in the nickel-mines. Although their conditions were little better than the convicts, many of them, when released from their indentures, were able to participate

in the economy through employment and education. By contrast, the Kanaks, living by subsistence agriculture, became increasingly marginalized and disenfranchised. Dispossessed of most of their lands, their position worsened by the two unsuccessful Kanak revolts of 1878 and 1917, they suffered a drastic decline in population. This was only reversed later on in this century.

Radicalized by the unparalleled prosperity and freedoms brought by the Second World War, the Kanaks started to make political demands, eventually gaining French citizenship in the 1950s. [New Caledonia was officially transformed from a colony to a French overseas territory in 1946.] From the 1950s to the 1970s, they were again marginalized. Algerian independence and the nickel boom increased immigration, until the Kanaks became an ethnic minority within their own country. This culminated in "les événements" of the 1980s, when the Kanaks demanded New Caledonia's independence and the departure of those born elsewhere. The 1988 Matignon Agreement opened up greater employment and educational opportunities for the Kanaks, promising that in 1998 France would carry out a referendum on independence, to determine the wishes of the people.

Part 2 (Chapters 6-7) deals with fieldwork in Maré. It includes my decision to go to Maré, and examines my relationship with my host, Rekab, and with others. It describes the village in which I was staying and outlines the social organization of the island.

Part 2 is less detailed than some of the others. This partly because of lack of time and partly because to treat it more fully would be to shift the focus of the thesis from the hostellers (discussed in part 3) to the Kanaks. I intend to expand some of the descriptions and arguments in these chapters and present them elsewhere.

Part 3 (Chapters 9-15) is the core of the thesis and deals with what is essentially the sociology of work and leisure. It looks at young, mostly French, migrants and visitors to New Caledonia, staying in Nouméa's hostel. It examines their problems in finding work and otherwise adjusting to life in an new country. The hostellers are described as dividing into two broad cross-cutting groups: the workers and the travellers. The main differences between them were that the workers were principally interested in improving their career prospects, while the travellers were trying to establish their individuality and sense of self-identity through travel and an escape from routinization.

Both the workers and the travellers are shown as participating in the capitalist system of consumption and production, a theme expanded in Part 4. This includes the manufacture and ingestion of Western images of the exotic, tied into an analysis of travel as a modern mixture of hedonism and romanticism. This part of the thesis also deals with some travellers' anti-social behaviour and the extent to which Bohemianism forms part of the bourgeois life-style.

There is a broad class analysis which draws heavily on Bourdieu. There is also a chapter and sections on methodology, as well as reflexive musings on anthropology and people's responses to me as an anthropologist. Memory and life experience are shown to contribute to "writing-up" and to my eventual realization that the focus of the thesis was not the Kanaks but the hostellers.

Part 4 (Chapters 16-24) gives an overall view of the town of Nouméa, seeing it as a manifestation of French colonial power and social order. It refers to the Centre Jean-Marie Tjibaou and some of the motives behind this architecturally prestigious project, including tourism.

It then looks at New Caledonia's traditional reticence towards the tourist trade, and recent attempts to overcome it. It shows how this is affected by cultural opposition between French and Kanaks. "Ethnic tourism" is discussed as exemplified by travellers and tourists at the hostel. It elaborates upon the argument that travel and tourism are romantic forms of capitalist consumption. It includes an evaluation of tourism on Maré, including my own attitude as an anthropologist.

Tourism and transience are seen as affecting the hostellers', and Melanesians', recreational use of kava, cannabis and alcohol. Such consumption is shown to have different meanings, including sexual meanings, for different ethnic groups. For the Kanaks, but not for the hostellers, such

consumption is strongly political.

The loose tribalism of the hostellers, and the collective mentalities of different social and ethnic groups, is related to past and present attempts to maintain cultural identity. Nouméa's sports and amateur cultural diversions are seen as distractions from the intellectual acknowledgement of unpleasant social realities. All groups, but especially the Caldoches and the Kanaks, at the top and bottom of the political and other hierarchies, are shown as competing with each other. This was compounded by New Caledonia's official silences and flourishing rumour-mills, with gossip forming the main network of information throughout the Territory.

The hostellers had different reactions to the Kanaks and the Caldoches, the travellers being more interested in the Kanaks, the workers in the Caldoches. Continuing stories of Kanak violence and hostility created ambivalent feelings among those planning to stay in New Caledonia.

"Les événements" are shown to have reinforced Caldoche conceptions of barbarism and civilization, and increased Caldoche fears of the Kanaks. These are implicit in public reactions to the 1992 burning of Prisunic-Barrau, a spectacular example of public disorder.

The thesis then moves towards wider issues of urbanization and globalization, as channels of production and consumption. These are evident in urban Nouméa's impact upon

the rural Kanaks, who were increasingly integrated into the positional economy, where social status depends on consumption. New Caledonia is then analyzed as a highly politicized society riven by factionalism and discord, as various ethnic groups try to improve and safeguard their positions before the 1998 referendum on independence. This leads to questions about power, cultural identity, and the complicity of the subjugated in maintaining social order. It concludes that the possible future independence of New Caledonia depends less on local desires than on France's wider, international, political and economic interests.

The thesis ends on a personal note, with reflections on my behaviour in the field and whether any alternative courses of action were possible. Kanak reactions are considered in terms of traditional Pacific power and authority. I ask myself whether ethnographers should adopt any particular professional stances towards the groups they study, and how far it is permissible to criticize societies different from one's own. I decide that no answers are applicable in all cases: the ethnographer must write as he or she sees fit.

PART 1

NEW CALEDONIA IN PERSPECTIVE

1

THE GEOGRAPHY AND ECONOMY OF NEW CALEDONIA

Geography

New Caledonia is a French overseas territory lying just above the Tropic of Capricorn, 1,500 kilometres off the east coast of Australia. The third largest island of the Pacific, after New Guinea and New Zealand, it has a total land surface of 19,110 kilometres ^{2}. Its mainland, known as la Grande Terre, has the second largest barrier reef in the world, extending up to 65 kilometres from the mainland and enclosing the world's biggest lagoon. Both in and outside the lagoon are off-lying clusters of raised coral islands, notably the Belep islands to the north, the Isle of Pines to the south, and the more distant Loyalty group (Maré, Tiga, Lifou, Ouvéa), situated roughly 100 kilometres parallel to the east coast.

La Grande Terre is some 400 kilometres long by roughly 50 kilometres wide, and is divided along its length by a chain of mountains, few of which rise above 1,000 metres. The two coasts are radically different. The west has alluvial lowlands and wide plains covered with forests of niaouli (a type of stunted eucalyptus, melaleuca leucadendron). Edged with foothills, it contrasts sharply with the east coast, where the mountains plunge almost into the sea. The east coast receives at least twice as much rainfall as the west and its narrow littoral has luxuriant vegetation with an abundance of coconut palms.

The west coast is inhabited mainly by Europeans, whose main activity is raising beef cattle. The principal inhabitants of the east coast are Kanaks, growing coffee and practising subsistence farming, with few cattle.

The southern part of la Grande Terre, especially the south-east, is sparsely inhabited, being unsuitable for agriculture. It consists of massive mineral outcrops, containing iron and high-grade nickel ore, as well as traces of tungsten, chromium, cobalt, copper, and manganese. Isolated mineral deposits are found throughout the mainland.

The coral islands of the Loyalties have what is basically subsistence agriculture, although a few crops (such as avocados in Maré) are produced for export. In the early 1990s, Ouvéa produced (financially subsidised) low-grade copra, used in local soap manufacture.

Economy

New Caledonia is rich in mineral resources, it having been estimated that the country contains at least a fifth and possibly more of the world's nickel reserves. In the mid-1980s, New Caledonia ranked third in world nickel reserves and production, after Canada and the USSR. Most of the nickel goes to Japan. Until now, New Caledonia's main source of income has been nickel-mining, but this was and continues to be affected by the 1992 slump on the world market, together with increased world production.

Cattle-raising and coffee-growing, the other monetary activities, are minor in comparison. High local demand ensuring that both beef and coffee have to be imported, despite local production. New Caledonia has an increasingly urban population and one of the smallest agricultural workforce in the Pacific. At the time of fieldwork, virtually all foodstuffs were imported and imports were usually cheaper than local products. Production was inhibited by lack of infrastructure, inadequate transport, and other factors. In the 1980s, commercial agriculture made up only 2% of New Caledonia's gross domestic product. Previous attempts at commercial diversification, with cotton and sugarcane, at the end of the nineteenth century and the early years of this, failed.

In the early 1990s, all important sectors of the economy, and the means of production and distribution, were in European (non-Kanak) hands, despite Kanak labour participation in coffee-growing. Although a source of raw materials (nickel and other minerals) for France and a market for finished French products, New Caledonia receives French financial subsidies (said, in the early 1990s, to be more than New Caledonia's actual financial output). At the time of fieldwork, the economy was grossly distorted. The commercial sector fed off an artificially inflated public sector [1], to the private profit of the country's economic

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1 In 1984, 30% of New Caledonia's total territorial revenue came in direct contributions and grants from France. In 1988, the public administration employed one-quarter of the wage labour force and contributed virtually half the wages and salaries in New Caledonia. [Civil servants posted from France to New Caledonia were paid on a bonus system.] [See Jean Chesneaux, "Kanak

oligarchy. Some fifty rich and powerful families, with interests in commerce, mining and land, controlled the economy. They generally reinvested their profits elsewhere, often in France and Australia. Any profits remaining in New Caledonia tended to be spent on imported consumer luxuries in Nouméa and surrounding areas, with minimal trickle-down.

In 1988, the average income per inhabitant was US$10,000, making New Caledonia comparable to Hong Kong and Singapore. However, these figures hid and still hide great disparities of wealth, not only between different ethnic groups, such as Europeans, other Pacific Islanders and Kanaks, but also within them. There are, for example, rich and poor Europeans.

It is currently attempting to stimulate its tourist industry, which, until the early 1990s, was largely confined to Nouméa and the Isle of Pines. There are considerable undeveloped maritime resources. New Caledonia's exclusive economic zone, of 200 nautical miles from each emergent land-mass, amounts to some 1,740,000 kilometres^2, the second largest in the world.

Political Culture/French Political Practice" 1988:69; Alan Ward, John Connell, Michael Spencer, "The Coq and the Cagou", 1988: 7,8; Isabelle Leblic, Les Kanak face au développement, 1993: 50-52.]

2

THE HISTORY OF NEW CALEDONIA

The European Discovery of New Caledonia

New Caledonia was discovered by Captain James Cook, of Her Majesty's Ship "Resolution", during his second voyage around the world. On 4 September 1774, he anchored off the north-east coast of la Grande Terre, and, the next day, landed at Balade. He named the island New Caledonia because its tall pines (araucaria cooki) and mountains reminded him of Scotland. In 1792, Cook was followed by a French explorer, the Chevalier Antoine Bruni d'Entrecasteaux.

From the 1840s onward there were numerous early explorers, who contacted the Kanaks for trade and, or, missionization. Anglophone traders visited the mainland, and went to the Loyalties for sandalwood and sea slugs, "bêche-de-mer". Loyalty Islanders were recruited as ships' crew for trading vessels and whaling expeditions, while "blackbirders" exported Melanesian contract labourers from New Caledonia and the New Hebrides to the Queensland sugarcane plantations and elsewhere. French Catholic Marists went to la Grande Terre, while the London Missionary Society sent English Protestants to the Loyalty Islands, the latter being heralded and accompanied by Polynesian "teachers".

The mid-nineteenth century saw Britain, Germany, and the United States successfully establish colonies and protectorates throughout the Pacific. In 1853, both Britain

and France tried to annex New Caledonia: the French got there first. Emperor Napoleon III was anxious to give France a foothold in the western Pacific to rival that of other powers, and to create a French penal colony, healthier than Guyane and similar to New South Wales.

The European Settlement of New Caledonia

In the 1850s and 1860s, Australian and European traders and adventurers began to settle in New Caledonia. Large grants of land were made, most notably to James Paddon, the Anglo-Irish opium, sandalwood, and general, trader and "blackbirder".

The first shipment of French convicts arrived in 1864, followed in 1872 by deported members of the Paris Commune and other political prisoners. Efforts were made, from 1894 onwards, to improve the stock of New Caledonian colonists by encouraging emigration from France, the "colons Feillet", to supplant the existing mixture of convicts, Australian and European colonists, stockmen and traders. The flow of convicts ended in 1898.

Various schemes, such as coffee-growing, were tried, but nothing could rival the profitability of mining. The discovery of nickel, "Garnierite", in 1864, was followed by that of successful production techniques in the 1870s. Nickel-mining began with the digging of huge open-cast mines, such as the one at Thio in 1875. From the 1880s onwards indentured labourers were imported from the New Hebrides, Polynesia, Japan, China and Indochina. The most reliable

workers proved to be the Indochinese, who became the dominant group. These groups were to permanently change the composition of the population, each retaining its distinctive characteristics.

European Interaction with the Kanaks

In 1868 the Kanaks, who had previously been on more or less good terms with the Europeans, were herded into reservations. La Grande Terre was opened to mining and stock-raising. Kanak lands began to be stolen, for plantations, but principally for cattle ranching, from the 1870s onwards. The Kanaks' subsistence agriculture (yam fields and taro terraces) were destroyed by marauding cattle in the dry season of 1877, threatening starvation [1].

In 1878 the first concerted Kanak revolt began, led by the high chief Atai, at La Foa. Some two hundred colonists and at least one thousand Kanaks lost their lives. Several tribes joined the Europeans, so as to wipe out their old enemies. Further repression followed, with the clans being forced onto each others' lands, while their own were expropriated by Europeans. Some 11% of the land, in scattered, hilly areas, was left to indigenous use. It was wrongly assumed that Kanak lands were communal, and the community could therefore expand to accommodate newcomers [2].

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1 For discussions of the 1878 revolt and its causes , see Jacqueline Sénès La vie quotidienne en Nouvelle-Calédonie de 1850 à nos jours 1987:108-109; Roselène Dousset-Leenhardt Terre natale, Terre d'exil 1976: 56-57, 93-94.

2 See Alain Saussol "Du front pionner à la réforme: colonisation et problèmes fonciers en Nouvelle-Calédonie (1853-1985)" 1986:286.

Kanak numbers declined rapidly, accelerated by malnourishment and diseases, such as leprosy and pneumonia. [A process which the Administration found convenient and entirely natural, as similar indigenous deaths were occurring elsewhere in the Pacific. The Kanak population only started to rise again in the early part of this century.] Under the "Statut de l'Indigènat" (1887), the Kanaks became a disenfranchised minority in their own country. A heavy capitation tax and a system of forced labour was introduced, often to the profit of local land-owners. [It was the Kanaks' unwillingness to participate in wage labour that led to the importation of indentured labourers.] The French administration tried to increase their control over the Kanaks by imposing new chiefs. These chiefs were held responsible for manpower supply and other things, despite their lack of traditional Kanak authority.

In 1917 there was a second revolt, in which eleven Europeans and about two hundred Kanaks died.

The radicalizing impact of the Second World War, with the arrival of American troops, led to the Kanaks eventually requesting, and receiving, French citizenship (as did other indigenous inhabitants of French colonies). This formed part of the democratic reforms instituted in France during the Fourth Republic (1946-1958). It corresponded with a change in New Caledonia's legal status, in 1946, from colony to French overseas territory. Kanaks gradually acceded to full citizenship. [Until 1946, Kanaks could not leave their lands

without police permission: only in 1953 were Kanak children admitted into the public school system and only in 1957 were all adults able to vote.]

The Second World War

The Second World War proved a turning-point in New Caledonia's history. After the fall of France, in 1940, New Caledonia turned against its pro-Vichy governor and supported the Free French. From 1942 to 1944, la Grande Terre became the major staging post for the Pacific war, hosting what were, at times, over five hundred thousand members of the American, Australian and New Zealand armed forces (Sénès 1987:269-284). The Japanese had already reached the Solomons. They were turned back by the battles of the Coral Sea, in May 1942, Midway, in June 1942, and Guadalcanal, in February 1943, allowing an American counter-offensive. New Caledonia had literally saved the South Pacific. At the same time, both Kanaks and Europeans had experienced unparalleled prosperity and independence. This was to be at the root of many of the colony's subsequent problems with France.

The Politicization of the Kanaks

After the Second World War, Kanaks began to struggle towards greater opportunities, such as access to health care, secondary education and formal employment. In 1947, the majority of Melanesians were represented by two church-based social welfare and development organizations, the Catholic UCIALO (l'Union des Indigènes Calédoniens Amis de la Liberté dans l'Ordre) and the Protestant AICLF (l'Association des Indigènes

Calédoniens et Loyaltiens Français). In 1951, these effectively united in the UC (Union Calédonienne), a gradualist, populist, political party. Its purpose was social integration (slogan "Deux couleurs, un seul peuple"). The UC was essentially a coalition of diverse interests knit together in opposition to Nouméa's oligarchy of commercial, and land-owning families (Henningham 1992:60). Yet despite the efforts of the UC, the Kanaks remained consistently marginalized, living impoverished rural lives [3].

In the 1960s, the first young Kanaks went to France for university education. Among them was the Maréan high chief Nidoish Naisseline, creator of the 1969 "Foulards Rouges", the first party to call for Kanak independence. The UC had dwindled, by the late 1960s and 1970s, into a centre-left, mainly Melanesian party. It became part of the independence grouping FLNKS ("Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste"). Meanwhile, Caledonian politics split into an increasing number of political fronts, political parties and para-political groupings. The most important ranged from the right-wing extremist "Front National", to the conservative RPCR ("Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République"), to the revolutionary PALIKA ("Parti de Libération Kanak": part of the FLNKS) to the LKS ("Libération Kanak Socialiste": formerly known as the "Foulards Rouges" and no longer part of the FLNKS). In the 1979 elections, some 70% of

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3 In the 1980s, the Kanaks had no more land per capita than they had at the start of the century (John Connell "Towards Kanaky?" 1987a:296). In 1986, seven out of ten still lived on the reservations, depending largely on subsistence crops (J-P Doumenge "La Nouvelle-Calédonie, à la recherche de son équilibre économique et de son unité social" 1986:229).

Kanaks are thought to have voted for the independence parties (Stanley 1986:373). South Pacific Handbook David

"Les événements"

Waves of violence, known as "les événements", marked the 1980s. These began in 1981 with the assassination of Pierre Declerq, of the pro-independence Union Calédonienne, culminating in the 1989 assassination of the Kanak independentist leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou. Among the most notorious incidents was the murder of ten unarmed Kanak activists in Hienghène in 1984, succeeded in 1985 by the police killing of Eloi Machoro and Marcel Noraro, two members of the provisional government of Kanaky. [This was established in 1984, later merging with the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak Socialiste (FLNKS), an independence grouping which also contained the erstwhile "Foulards Rouges".] These deaths led to mines being sabotaged in retaliation, but also to anti-independence riots in Nouméa. Fears grew of a white backlash.

In April 1988, on the eve of the French elections, the FLNKS determined to make a dramatic gesture to proclaim Kanak rights to independence. This consisted of various illegal acts. Among them was the capture of the gendarmerie at Fayaoué on Ouvéa, with the death of four gendarmes and the wounding of five others. Most of the island's remaining gendarmes were held as hostages in a grotto near the village of Gossanah. The French security forces were deployed. By the end of the siege, twenty-five people had been killed, four

gendarmes, two French soldiers, and nineteen Kanaks, many seemingly executed by the security forces. In addition, three people were shot dead in incidents on the mainland.

Recriminations mutiplied. The French Gaullist administration was replaced by a socialist one. President Mitterand, who had been re-elected, took on the rôle of peacemaker. In June 1988 the Matignon agreement, the "Accords de Matignon", promised a referendum on independence to be held in 1998. It also pledged considerable amounts of money for specific social, cultural, and economic development projects in the north and in the islands (with less money for the more prosperous south).

[The final outburst of violence was the 1989 assassination on Ouvéa of Jean-Marie Tjibaou and his aide Yeiwené Yeiwené, Kanak leaders of the FLNKS and signatories of the Matignon agreement. They were accused of having "sold out" to the French, by their assassin Djubelly Wéa, the Protestant pastor from Gossanah. He had been badly treated by French security forces during the 1988 hostage crisis.]

The Matignon Agreement and its Future Implications

Under the 1988 Matignon Agreement, New Caledonia is in a ten-year transitional period, the run-up to the final self-determination (independence) referendum of 1998. New Caledonia is now organized into three self-governing provinces, each with its own provincial assembly: the largely

European southern mainland, and the largely Kanak northern mainland and Loyalty Islands. A territorial congress is responsible for matters affecting the whole territory.

The non-Kanak majority are generally in favour of continued association with France, while most of the Kanaks are more inclined towards an independent Melanesian state of Kanaky. The outcome of the 1998 referendum remains uncertain, especially as the French socialist administration of President Mitterand has been replaced by that of the conservative Jacques Chirac.

3

KANAK AND EUROPEAN INTERACTIONS

It seems clear that few radical social shifts took place in New Caledonia after European contact. When it proved impossible to expel the invaders, the Kanaks tried, as much as possible, to ignore them. They retreated to their ever-diminishing reservations to continue their traditional way of life, disrupted though it was by forced labour and other external requirements. This life-style, described in the writings of a handful of ethnographers (see below), had certain salient features which persist today. Others, such as ritual cannibalism, have long since disappeared, while some, such as arranged marriages, are considerably attenuated [1].

Traditional Kanak Society

In 1774, when Captain Cook and his crew first landed at Balade, New Caledonia had been inhabited for over three thousand years. [Lapita pottery, made without a potter's wheel, carbon-dated earlier than 1, 000 BC, has been found near Koné, the Isle of Pines, and elsewhere.] The Lapita people left their distinctive pottery, with its surface geometrical designs in Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, the Solomons, New Britain and New Ireland. Who these people were

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1 Young people are now usually consulted, or make their own choice, as to their prospective marriage partner, although it is effectively impossible to have a traditional, customary, marriage without the participation, and therefore approval, of both families.

has yet to be established, but they seem to have been culturally identical with the ancestors of the Polynesians. They are thought to have been migrants from Vanuatu [2] .

New Caledonia forms part of the cultural overlap [3] between Melanesia and Polynesia which runs north to Tikopia and the Santa Cruz islands, and includes Vanuatu and its Polynesian outliers of Futuna and Aneityum. It shows a mixture of Melanesian and Polynesian, particularly Samoan, Tongan and Wallisian (Uvean), racial and cultural influences (to which I shall refer only in the most general terms). The original inhabitants of la Grande Terre can be described as Melanesian, although immigrant Wallisian and Samoan chiefships dotted its eastern coasts. The Isle of Pines high chiefship came from Aneityum in Vanautu. The Loyalty Islanders, especially those from Ouvéa, show marked Polynesian attributes [4].

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2 For a discussion of the Lapita people, see Ian C. Campbell, A History of the Pacific Islands (1989:30-31).

3 Although I do not intend to discuss definitions of the Melanesian/Polynesian division as such, the Polynesian influence on the Loyalty Islanders was sometimes cited by the Caldoches, and others, as explaining why, according to the speakers, they were easier to get on with, and better looking (sometimes with "straight hair") than the Kanaks of la Grande Terre. This was, I am sure, because the speakers were affected by the romantic vision of Polynesia promoted by Bougainville, who arrived in Tahiti in 1768, and his followers. Polynesians were seen as "civilised' in a way that Melanesians were not. Nicholas Thomas deals with this cultural division in "The Force of Ethnology: Origins and Significance of the Melanesia/Polynesia Division" (1989: 27-34). Campbell (1989:13-27) analyses various cultural and racial traits associated with Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

4 On Ouvéa roughly half the population are descendants of Wallis Islanders, who arrived as refugees in the eighteenth century and settled in the northern and southern extremities of the island. Hence the two languages spoken, Iaai and the Faga Uvea. On Lifou, the migrants were incorporated into the clan system and given land. On Maré they were tolerated but denied political authority. Finally they are said to have risen up and massacred the original inhabitants, the

Kanak Language Groups : Today and Yesterday

The number of Kanak language and population groups at the time of first contact is unclear but is thought to have been above thirty. The indigenous Melanesian languages of New Caledonia all belong to the Austronesian family group but can differ widely from each other (as, for example, Spanish differs from Russian). Stephen Schooling, in Language Maintenance in Melanesia (1990:9-10), points out that New Caledonian languages are difficult to classify, as the forced resettlement of Kanaks following the revolts of 1878 and 1917, and other incidents, means that some languages are gradually dying out. Maurice Leenhardt's "Langues et Dialectes de l'Austro-Mélanésie" (1946), and André-Georges Haudricourt's "New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands" (1971), which further refines Leenhardt's classification, leave six major linguistic areas generally accepted, with five areas on the mainland and one in the Loyalty group. Between twenty-seven and thirty-five indigenous languages are still spoken, with the task of distinguishing between languages and dialects as yet uncompleted.

Past and Present Social and Political Structures

The Kanaks' pre-contact social and political structure, the chiefships and high chiefships of la Grande Terre, coincided with traditional language areas, some of which cut across the mountain chain. Each language group expressed its distinct identity through particular myths and traditions.

"eletok", in or around 1800. Maré and Lifou also have chiefly languages, whose use is dying out.

All of New Caledonia, including the islands, was and is organized into chiefships. The most elaborate hierarchies were (and still are) found in the Loyalty Islands. Genealogies were comparatively shallow, owing to the "brotherly" ideology of the clans. Although personal qualities were important in the validation of chiefly status, chiefship usually passed through direct descent.

The chiefships consisted of series of interrelated and interranked clans. The chief was (and still is) assisted by a council of elders, the "conseil des anciens", which prevented the chiefship from becoming a feudal autocracy. Each clan had (and still has) a specialist function, such as yam-growing or fishing. The most important clans of all were those of the original inhabitants, the masters of the land, the "maîtres de la terre". Although subordinate to the chiefs, it was they who legitimated the use of the land for yam and taro growing, by strangers or kin.

The chiefships of New Caledonia all trace their origins from particular sites, such as mounds, from which the clans' guardian spirits (ancestors and or totems) are thought to have originated (although the Polynesian chiefships of the mainland coasts and islands maintain the tradition of the elected "stranger chief"). New Caledonian political power has a mythico-spatial origin (eg Maurice Leenhardt Gens de la Grande Terre 1937:201-202). However dispersed the clans might be, they identified themselves by reference to this inalienable

sacred site, as they do today (Alban Bensa and Jean-Claude Rivierre Les chemins de l'alliance 1982: 32-33; Alain Rollat Tjibaou le kanak 1989: 178-179).

Kanak society was (and still is) generally viripatrilocal, patrilineal and exogamous, with rank and inheritance coming from the father, and clan membership from the mother. Leenhardt (1937:147) saw this separation of political and economic status from clan membership as giving Kanak society its relative political stability [5].

The Kanak economy was and is based on subsistence agriculture and exchange. Yam (a "dry", "male", product) and taro (a "wet", "female", product) were and are the staple and ritual food stuffs, having customary and symbolic roles which give them strong affective connotations. Yams, exchanged between men, were and are the most important symbolic item. Complex irrigation systems and taro terracing on hill-sides (which continues today) show the Kanaks to have been an agriculturally accomplished people. [Theirs were the only taro terraces in the whole of Melanesia and Polynesia: these may have been linked to the development of rice terraces among other Malayo-Polynesian peoples.] On la Grande Terre, yams would be exchanged for fish, through the trading networks existing between the mountain and coastal peoples. Fish and birds were the main sources of protein, as pre-contact New

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5 A theory which seems truer for la Grande Terre than for the islands, especially Maré. Here warfare became endemic, while land and resources were scarce, although it can be argued that, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, this was partly due to European influence.

Caledonia had no mammals other than rats and flying foxes. Yam and taro harvests were strictly controlled. Periods of scarcity alternated with those of abundance. The first yams of the harvest were and are reserved for the chief, who redistributes them as appropriate. Yams had and have an almost mystical significance, serving as a metaphor for human life (eg Leenhardt, Do Kamo, 1947: 124). They were and are presented on all ceremonial occasions, such as visits, marriages, mourning feasts, and "pilous" [6], showing the potential kinship of all participants.

As well as yam and fish exchanges, there were more elaborate trading networks, similar to the "kula" (Leenhardt 1937:95; Marie-Joseph Dubois Gens de Maré 1984:240-243, 246-248; Kerry R. Howe The Loyalty Islands 1977:8; Jean Guiart Structure de la Chefferie en Mélanésie du Sud 1963:637-638). In these, precious objects of shell and of "jade" (serpentine or greenstone) were exchanged. These were extraordinarily labour-intensive and their manufacture did not long survive European contact. These included necklaces for women, fastened with cords of flying fox wool, shell bracelets, shell ornaments worn by men, and the sacred "sio", the round ceremonial serpentine axe which was a symbol of chiefship, and had ritualistic functions. There were two trade cycles, moving clockwise and counter-clockwise in a network linking the coasts of la Grande Terre, the Isle of Pines, the Loyalty Islands and the Polynesian outlier of Aneityum in

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6 A "pilou" is a rhythmic stupefying dance with sacred overtones, inducing a feeling of brotherhood, and celebrating common ancestry among the participants, practised in la Grande Terre.

Vanuatu. Many of these precious objects would take several generations to complete a cycle. They were exchanged on great occasions, such as marriage feasts: their ownership depended on rank: they had their own closed value system and could not be assessed in terms of foodstuffs.

Today there survive equally precious and labour-intensive objects, known as Kanak money, "la monnaie kanak", made from the wool and bones of flying foxes, shells, and other substances. These are made on la Grande Terre (but not on the Loyalties or Isle of Pines), and are exchanged there on great ritual occasions.

New Caledonia's economic and social system depended on the politics of the marriage alliance, for it was this that ensured the power and survival, through descendants, of the clan, and it was through marriage that clans obtained rights over land. [The emphasis on marriage continues today but the clan motive, although present, may be less powerful than it once was.] On la Grande Terre, women were exchanged between clans in alternate generations (the widespread practice of child adoption is and was a variant of this). Chiefs, although usually not commoners, were polygamous, so creating and reinforcing alliances.

Cousins were and are classificatory brothers and sisters, with the possible exception of cross-sex cross-cousins, who may have been regarded as suitable marriage partners. [I am not sure about the continuing general applicability of this, as I

was told, when in Maré, that no cousins (including third cousins) were suitable marriage partners.] Avoidance did and does take place between brother and sister after the age of puberty, in case a sister acquires magical or political knowledge which her future husband might one day use against her brother, and,. or, his clan. Women, although overtly dominated by men (less so today than in the past), had and still have their sphere of political power and action. It is (and presumably was) they who arrange(d) the marriages, acted as political mediators in time of war [7] , as sisters have (and had) rights over their brothers, and through childbirth bring prestige to themselves, their clans, and their husbands' families.

On la Grande Terre, and possibly, in the Loyalties, the women and children of each family lived together in small round houses behind the clan-house; the men of the family lived in a slightly larger one. On la Grande Terre, but not the Loyalties, the chief lived in a great beehive-shaped hut [8], "la grande case". [The huts in the Loyalties have a squat, round, or sometimes, square, Polynesian-type shape, although chiefs there also had and still have a "grande case".] This hut

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7 In saying that women acted as political mediators between their natal and marital clans and families in times of war, is not to suggest that this is what has happened in revolts and clashes between Kanaks and Europeans. Although some women have played a relatively prominent part in "les événements", to say that they have acted as mediators or spokeswomen would, I think, be exaggerated. The rôle of women in "les événements" awaits analysis and lies outside the scope of this thesis.

8 Beehive huts as dwelling-places are now comparatively few on la Grande Terre, there having been efforts in the early part of this century to replace them with European-style verandahed bungalows, claimed to be more hygienic.

symbolised the glory of the clan. The doorframe was carved with ancestral figures. The immense roof was topped with a "flêche faitière" ancestral sculpture (so called because it resembled an inverted arrow), culminating in a conch containing ("female") totemic grasses or leaves. Conches were and are signs of political power, used to call people to assembly.

On la Grande Terre, the chief's hut was often on a mound or other place of spiritual significance. This was reflected, as were political and social structures, in the lay-out of the village. Nearby was a flat dancing-ground for the dancing feasts, or "pilous". This ended in avenues of trees. Between these trees, yams and other ceremonial items would be exchanged. The avenues represented maternal and paternal clan lines. Certain plants and trees represented the female "wet" element, others the male "dry" element.

Religion was a combination of ancestor and totem worship, the relationship between the two - was the ancestor a totem in human form or a distinct entity? - being a matter for ethnographic discussion (eg Guiart 1963: 146-148; Dubois 1984:290; Leenhardt 1937:182). The totem might be a lizard, gecko, bird or other relatively insignificant manifestation of the natural world (in Maré, where I was, it could be in human shape, although the exact details were never made clear to me). It is and was regarded with mingled fear and affection, expressed by certain taboos on clan members. Religion was principally concerned with safeguarding the clan, hence the

continuing use of sorcery against rival clans and the fear in which the dead, as the victims of malevolent sorcery but also as a source of power, were regarded.

The essence of Kanak society is a quasi-mythical relationship with nature (notably expressed in Leenhardt's Do Kamo 1947). The body was the focal analogy for understanding the universe, with the natural world impinging upon the human. Leenhardt's celebrated examples describe men as yams (1947:124), sweat as sap (1937:75-76), the dead inhabiting trees (1937:77-78). Other authors have similar material.

For the Kanaks the landscape was (and is) a semi-sacred political arena, in which man is an integral part, of nature. Pre-contact warfare seems to have been undertaken for revenge rather than to drive the enemy off their land. The losers would pay tribute and increase the power of the conquering chiefdom. This limited warfare and contributed to relative political stability. It also meant that Kanak society was fundamentally disrupted by, and unable to accept, the loss of its lands through European colonization. This will be discussed in more detail, below.

The European Discovery of New Caledonia

From the very beginning, Kanak interactions with Europeans have been seen as problematic. This brief quasi-historical analysis of Kanak/European relationships looks at some of the reasons for this. It gives the background to some of the problems which continue today. As such, it is not concerned

with reviewing the several detailed ethnographic, missionary, and other, writings on the Kanaks, which I have approached primarily as a source of historical information.

Starting with Cook and d'Entrecasteaux, ethnographic and other forms of European literature have produced disparate accounts, with two radically opposing emphases, of Kanak society. First, writers such as Louise Michel (Légendes et chants de gestes canaques 1885), Pierre Lambert (Moeurs et superstitions des Néo-Calédoniens 1900) and Maurice Leenhardt (notably Gens de la Grande Terre 1937, Do Kamo 1946, etcetera) have presented the Kanaks as highly moral people with a pronounced sense of the sacred [9]. Second, travellers such as the famous Rarotongan "teacher" Ta'unga, who visited la Grande Terre, the Isle of Pines, and Maré, between 1842 and 1856, have described the Kanaks as violent, bloodthirsty, savages. Similar accounts come from Lambert (1900:31-35) and others escaping from, or hearing of, the slaughter of shipwrecked crews from trading and other vessels (eg the "Sisters," 1843, Maré; the "Star", 1842, the Isle of Pines; the "Alcmène," 1850, near Balade), as well as witnesses of the Kanak revolt of 1878.

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9 The school-mistress Louise Michel, "La Vierge Rouge" of the Paris Commune, was deported to New Caledonia in 1872. She was one of the few people to show a sympathetic attitude towards Kanak life, and to support them during the 1878 uprising. Pierre Lambert was a Marist missionary to the Belep islands and to the Isle of Pines. Maurice Leenhardt was a French Protestant missionary who arrived in New Caledonia in 1902 and spent most of his time in the region of Houailou. All three were idealistic people who were passionately concerned with the moral order.

Lambert's approach to the Kanaks is more detached than those of Michel and Leenhardt, being imbued with a sense of the imperfectibility of human nature.

Neither of these approaches can be dismissed as contradictory, nor as merely historical constructs, although it is possible to trace in them the Enlightenment, with its concern for "natural" innocence, giving way to the evolutionary debates, and to the fall/redemption theology, of the nineteenth century. Such views have been recorded elsewhere in the Pacific: for instance, in La Pérouse's account of Samoa in the late 1780s, contrasting the beauty of the islands with the ferocity of their inhabitants (Bernard Smith, European Vision and the South Pacific, 1985: 138,141).

The Kanaks, like other Pacific peoples and like everyone else, behave according to context. This pragmatism has been recognised by professional and missionary ethnographers, among them Emma Hadfield (Among the Natives of the Loyalty Group 1920), Marie-Joseph Dubois (Gens de Maré 1984 etcetera), Jean Guiart (Structure de la Chefferie en Mélanésie du Sud 1963, La Terre est le sang des morts 1985 etcetera) and Alban Bensa (Les Chemins de l'Alliance 1982 etcetera). Strangers who pose a possible threat, are rude and disrespectful, are treated differently from welcome guests.

Captain Cook's landing in New Caledonia in 1774 was marked by his good relationship with its inhabitants. He made speeches, observed an eclipse of the sun, and took on water: giving the natives beads, medals, pigs, and a couple of dogs. He departed, recording his favourable impressions of the people: their modest manners, their taro terraces, their beehive houses. D'Entrecasteaux, landing eighteen years later, in 1792,

was less impressed. He realised that he was among cannibals and left.

There are two possible explanations for the different receptions accorded to Cook and d'Entrecasteaux. First, Captain Cook, who was greeted as a visiting chief, is known to have had a very diplomatic personality and been remarkably gifted in his dealings with Pacific peoples. He may have been taken for an ancestor-spirit [10]. He arrived during a time of scarcity but saw no signs of cannibalism. D'Entrecasteaux arrived during a time of famine, in the aftermath of a war, and was unwittingly rude to the chiefs, who then allowed their men to harass his crew. Cook arrived during a time of peace, when no enemies had been slain (and eaten). The second possibility is that the people who greeted Captain Cook were subsequently wiped out by or incorporated into another group, and that it was this group which met d'Entrecasteaux. The first is generally accepted as the most probable explanation [11].

Missionization and Christianity

The Catholic Church

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10 Anova (Apollinaire) Ataba "contends that New Caledonians initially welcomed the European settlers as long-lost ancestors who had returned from the past. For them their reappearance was a time of great joy, but soon happiness dissolved into bitterness, for with the arrival of the Europeans came demands of land and women." Alexander Mamak and Ahmed Ali, in Race, Class and Rebellion in the South Pacific (1979:128) referring to Ataba, "The New Caledonian revolt in 1878 and its consequences today" (1973). [Also see Dousset-Leenhardt 1978:39.]

11 For a discussion of the Cook/d'Entrecasteaux disparities, see, for example, Yves Person ~~La Belle au bois dormant~~ 1954: 22-24; Roselène Dousset-Leenhardt Colonialisme et contradictions 1978:46-47.

A famous example of cross-cultural misinterpretation is the arrival at Balade, in 1843, of French Catholic missionaries of the Society of Mary. Set down by a French warship, and led by the bishop Guillaume Douarre, their presence was seen by the French government as a useful precursor to French annexation. Initially delighted with the Kanaks' gifts and original friendliness, they saw this as Divine Providence, needing no exchange. The Marists' eventual failure to reciprocate meant that relationships with the natives gradually deteriorated. These were exacerbated in 1846 by the arrival of over two hundred shipwrecked French sailors, who spread diseases among the native population. The sailors eventually departed but the damage had been done. In 1847, a series of attacks forced the Marists to leave although they returned in 1851 (Dousset-Leenhardt 1978:49-74). The Marists' insistence on bestowing baptism and the last rites on the dying convinced the Kanaks that the missionaries were powerful sorcerers who wished to kill them.

Throughout the nineteenth century, otherwise anti-clerical French governments intermittently supported the efforts of first the Catholic and then also the Protestant missionaries, hoping that they would help "civilize" the natives (Kerry Howe The Loyalty Islands 1977:60-61).] The government's priority, however, was not missionization but the establishment of a penal colony.

Co-operation, land, and resources went to the Catholic (and, later, Protestant) missions in so far that they did not

impinge on any other scheme and helped control the Kanaks and, or, the convicts. Nuns ran the penitentiary farm-school at La Fonwhary: this received the children of convicts, including those forcibly removed from their parents. The Sisters of St Joseph de Cluny at Bourail supervised the marrying off of female convicts and orphans, imported to people the new colony. The Catholic Church in New Caledonia, unlike the Protestant ones, inculcated values nearly identical to those proclaimed by, and needed to uphold, the French state. It is for this reason that it has often been regarded somewhat suspiciously by those Caledonians descended from convicts or from political deportees, the Muslim Kabyles or the remnants of the Paris Commune. This is not to criticize the Church's traditional paternal benevolence towards the Kanaks, or others, nor its protests at their ill-treatment. But, as a rule, it still promotes the idea of a politically acceptable multi-ethnic colonial society, serving the interests of the Polynesian, Vietnamese, and other ethnic immigrant groups for whom Catholicism, France, and financial security, continue to go hand in hand. The Catholic Church continues to be half-hearted in its support for the Kanak independence movement, even though Jean-Marie Tjibaou and several other Kanak leaders were educated by it.

The Protestant Churches

The Protestant churches, now known as the Evangelical Church, "l'Eglise évangelique autonome," and, since 1958, its smaller offspring, the Free Evangelical Church, "l'Eglise évangelique libre", have from the beginning been defined as Melanesian

rather than French.

In the 1840s, the London Missionary Society (LMS) sent Polynesian "teachers" from Rarotonga and Samoa to the Isle of Pines and the Loyalty Islands. This initial attempt at evangelization was remarkably successful, owing to cultural similarities between the "teachers" and the islanders.

By the 1850s, converted Loyalty Island chiefs were demanding European LMS missionaries. [The Isle of Pines, under the high chief Vendegou, had finally opted for Catholicism in 1853.] LMS missionaries came to Maré in 1854, Lifou in 1859, and Ouvéa in 1864. Meanwhile, rival chiefs called upon the French Marists, who arrived on Ouvéa in 1857, Lifou in 1858, and Maré in 1866. This led to continual religious wars which the French were powerless to stop. [They lacked the resources to establish a permanent administration and garrison on the islands, which were in any case regarded as unsuited to European settlement.] It was not until the 1870s that some stability was brought to Ouvéa and Lifou, and, in 1895, to Maré (Howe 1977:70).

Throughout the nineteenth century, Loyalty Islanders had innumerable trade and other contacts with Europeans, Polynesians, and Melanesians (Howe 1977: 86-100). They became adept at playing Europeans off against each other. Nowhere was this more evident than on the Loyalties themselves, where those allying themselves with the Protestants fought interminably with their traditional

enemies, who claimed conversion by the French Catholics, their nominal colonizers. After about 1870, the LMS missionaries began to leave, ceding their roles to native pastors, while sandalwood and other trade contacts began to decline. At the beginning of the new century, the French declared the islands a native reserve, on which only missionaries and a few long-established Europeans were allowed to stay. Religious allegiances were generally identical to traditional political ones.

The result of all this was that Protestant religious practice became integrated with customary behaviour, "la coutume". This was principally because the LMS missionaries and teachers had translated the Bible into the Loyalty Islands' languages and encouraged the ordination of native deacons and pastors. Protestantism therefore became identified with the expression, preservation, and adaptation of Kanak culture. Catholicism, on the other hand, made few concessions, and insisted on religious services being held in French, with a Latin Mass (now virtually obsolete). This frequently resulted in nominal adherence but widespread incomprehension. [12].

Protestantism spread to the mainland after a "nata" [13]

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12 On Maré I met an Isle of Pines ex-Catholic who had converted to Protestantism upon marriage because his Protestant wife had insufficient French to convert to Catholicism.

13 "Nata" is a Maréan word for a Kanak pastor, used generically by Melanesian Protestants throughout New Caledonia. Some interesting references to the evangelization of the east coast are made in Mélanésiens d'Aujourdhui (par un groupe d'autochtones calédoniens) (1976:61). Also see John Garrett, To Live Among the Stars (1985:294-296).

from Lifou used traditional contacts with Houailou to carry out covert evangelization. In 1897, François Lengereau, the French Protestant chaplain to the Nouméa penitentiary, going upcountry, baptized one hundred and fifty of these Kanak converts. He had already persuaded the Paris Evangelical Society, "la Société des missions évangeliques de Paris," with the consent of the LMS, to send accredited missionaries to New Caledonia. The most famous of these was Maurice Leenhardt.

Leenhardt arrived in 1902, forming a mission station at Do Neva, at Houailou. He became a champion of Kanak rights against the local white colonists and the Administration. His writings brought Kanak culture to the attention of a wider public. It is thanks to him that the two largely Melanesian Protestant churches flourish today.

In 1979, the Evangelical Church's synod of Houailou declared that justice should be done to the Melanesian people by ending colonialism, and that the Melanesians, as first inhabitants of the land, were the only ethnic group that could legitimately claim its independence. It has since made further statements to that effect.

The Protestant churches, nominally supported by roughly a quarter of the population, are perceived as pro-Kanak independentists. The Catholic Church, nominally supported by roughly two-thirds of the population, is accepted as the

defender of the status quo [14].

14 See Jean-Marie Kohler "Churches and the Colonial Order" (1988: 174-192). These figures were given for 1978, but the high Kanak and Polynesian birth-rate over the next fifteen years probably made up for any falling away in Caldoche or French religious adherence. It was certainly my impression that the Churches continued to have a very strong influence on Kanaks and Polynesians.

4

FROM THE 1850S TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR: LAND, MIGRATION, AND DESCENT

The First Settlers

The population of New Caledonia was determined by the territory's economic needs, for each wave of immigrants came with a specific purpose. The convicts, for whom the colony had been created, were preceded by a mixture of Australian, Irish, and German immigrants. In the 1850s and early 1860s these adventurers traded between Sydney, the New Hebrides, the Loyalties, and Nouméa. They dealt with the Kanaks, the Administration, and the missionaries, often obtaining land which they either settled themselves or resold to a higher bidder. [For example, James Paddon sold l'île Nou to the Administration for use as a penitentiary, in exchange for land at Paita.] It was these people whose descendants later formed part of Nouméa's social ascendency, remnants of which survive today. Unlike free settlers, such as the impoverished "colons Feillet", they had often been financially successful. Their wealth came first from trade: later some of them went into mining and large-scale agriculture. Although some of them were to use convict labour in their plantations, mines and other projects, they and their children kept themselves aloof from the prison population.

The Convicts

New Caledonia was seen as a means of ridding France of its anti-social elements, political as well as criminal. In Paris,

massive social unrest had led to the proclamation, in 1848, of the Second Republic, a precursor of the Paris Commune of 1871. The Second Republic was quickly dissolved and succeeded in 1852 by the Second Empire, headed by the Emperor Napoleon III. There remained the problem of political and other prisoners, who were considered a threat to the expanding industrialization, urbanization, and commercial interests of French society.

Penal colonies were seen as enlightened substitutes to "le bagne", the prison hulks and labour in naval arsenals which had, in the eighteenth century, replaced the galleys. The penal colony of Guyane, whose first prisoners had arrived in 1795, had such a difficult environment and high mortality rate that New Caledonia offered a healthful and productive alternative.

Apart from political prisoners, those condemned to "le bagne" were either those sentenced to eight or more years hard labour for one particular crime, such as murder, rape, theft or fraud, or from 1887 onwards, multi-recidivists considered unfit for normal society. Either way, they were seen as a public menace, to be deported from France as soon as possible. Guyane continued to be used as a penal colony, its numbers increasing rapidly from 1852 onwards, always receiving more prisoners than New Caledonia. Yet New Caledonia's notorious conditions gave it an infamous reputation which persisted even into the 1920s (eg Beatrice Grimshaw Isles of Adventure 1930:248-271).

More than 20,000 convicts arrived in New Caledonia between 1864 and 1897. They were initially held on the île Nou, off Nouméa. At first, they provided labour for public works and construction projects, later working in mines and agriculture. From 1872 to 1879, nearly four thousand political prisoners from the Paris Commune of 1871 were held at île Nou and on the Isle of Pines, including Louise Michel. They were joined by several hundred Berber Kabyles, leaders of the Algerian uprising of 1871.

The Development of the Colony

It was initially supposed that such an inflow of free labour would rapidly develop the colony, but this was not so. Numerous onlookers complained of the impractical agricultural and other schemes, the wasted efforts of the penal administration. This was in spite of the administration having taken over large areas of arable land [1].

When Governor Feillet arrived, in 1894, New Caledonia was stagnating. Mining had been in a slump since 1892. Social problems were multiplying. The colony contained vast numbers of ex-prisoners forbidden to return to France, and so forced to get a living as best they could. Some of them became subsistence farmers or labourers. Others formed a roving class of vagabonds, thieves, and pickpockets, mostly around

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1 Traces of this unconcern persist. Until the Second World War there was no road around the mainland, it having been argued that it was easier to do everything by boat. A photo-journalist friend told me that when he went to the town hall in Nouméa in early 1992, on a transport assignment, he asked why the road north of Hienghène remained unmade. He was told that there was no point in putting down any tarmac, as only Kanaks lived there.

Nouméa. [By 1898, 12,732 of the inhabitants of New Caledonia were convicts or of penal origin. This amounted to about half the white population and one-quarter of the total population (Michel Pierre Le Dernier Exil 1989:85).]

It was to develop the colony that Governor Feillet demanded an end to penal transportation and decided to encourage emigration. [Transportation ceased in 1897.] He believed that coffee-growing, rather than more cattle-grazing, was the answer. Small and medium-sized coffee plantations would form around new centres of population, in the central mountain chain near La Foa, in the north-east valleys of Koné, Voh, and Gomen, and on the east coast between Canala and Hienghène. These would counter the micro-settlements of the freed convicts, "liberés", most of whom were established in the west coast valleys near Bourail and La Foa.

Governor Feillet encouraged the emigration of some five hundred agricultural families, the "colons Feillet", of whom about three hundred and fifty were from the north of France. These people, most of whom had little money, knowing nothing of the tropics, were rarely successful. Some scraped by on subsistence agriculture, becoming indebted to the trading companies of Ballande and others. They resembled the "liberés", who were allowed to farm small pieces of easily exhausted land, usually growing the penitentiary staples of maize, beans and sugar. Those "colons" who failed generally went to Nouméa. There they joined the growing class of small shop-keepers and artisans.

The coffee-growing scheme was disastrous for many reasons, not least because some of the emigrants were not farmers at all, but wanted a free trip to the colony. Another reason was that by ending penal transportation, Governor Feillet was running down "le Bagne", coffee's one steady local consumer. But the scheme had other consequences. It led to the massive seizure of nearly two-thirds of Kanak lands and consequent reduction of the reservations. Almost one hundred years later, the return of these lands was to become a perennial part of Kanak demands for independence.

Land and Agriculture

To obtain lands for coffee-growing, Governor Feillet had taken them from the Kanaks, continuing actions begun in 1878. Relying on their evident demographic decline, and predicted extinction, the governor ordered the reduction of Kanak reserves, from 320,000 hectares in 1895, to 120,000 hectares in 1905 (Saussol 1988:45). Various official pronouncements had stated that Kanak lands belonged to the French government (despite a decree of 1887 that had effectively guaranteed Oceanian natives the right to retain their lands). These were now acted upon. The "colons Feillet", each given 25 hectares in which to plant coffee, were given wedges of land between tribal reserves. Often the colonists took over the Kanaks' crops and lands, and then expected the Kanaks to work as wage-labourers to harvest the crops for them [2]

[2] Myriam Dornoy (1984:271) gives the example of the Lapetite family taking over coffee-crops at Hienghène; it was take-overs of this kind that led to the pent-up resentments and fears of Caldoches and Kanaks being let loose in the series of events which culminated in the massacre of Hienghène in December

Meanwhile, the ruin of the poorer settlers, especially after the blight of the arabica coffee plantations by "hemilia vastatrix" in 1910 [3], combined with the eventual deaths of many elderly single "liberés', meant that more and more small land concessions became available, which were often claimed by others. There was a process of dispossession and amalgamation. The Kanak population rose slowly but steadily and there was even a slight increase in the size of the reserves. Yet by the end of World War II there remained noticeable differences between the Kanaks, the poor, impoverished rural Caldoches, in debt to traders, and the fifty or so rich and powerful families of Ballande, Lafleur, Barrau, Pentecost, and others. The interests of this economic oligarchy combined mining, land and commerce, linking up with France, and with other territories in the Pacific.

The post-war period, especially the nickel boom of 1969 to 1972, finally allowed the rural Caldoches to better themselves. But the Kanaks continued with subsistence agriculture, often on clan-lands that were not their own, which they were only allowed to farm by sufferance. The solution, the Kanaks believed (and still do), lay in the return of their lands (Dornoy 1984: 70, 134; Leblic 1993:194-204).

1994 (for an extensive discussion of this see Lionel Duroy Hienghène, le désespoir calédonien 1988). Also see Leblic (1993:27) on lands given to the "colons Feillet".

3 The arabica coffee plantations were eventually largely replaced by robusta ones.

5

FROM THE POST-WAR PERIOD TO THE PRESENT: MASS IMMIGRATION AND THE NICKEL BOOM

Nickel-mining was to prove the territory's one steady economic activity, unaffected by crop-diseases and other variables. The huge "Société Le Nickel" (SLN) was founded in 1880. It took control of most of the nickel deposits and had contacts with Canada. Convicts were used in the mines from 1891 onwards, a "free" labour force which allowed the SLN to virtually take over the market. [Although certain independent mine-owners, "les petits mineurs", such as Lafleur, Pentecost, and Ballande, still retain interests in nickel mines today.] They were eventually replaced by Indochinese and other labourers, whose conditions of work were little better. Up to the Second World War, the Indochinese remained in the mines, but afterwards they diversified into small businesses, shops, and market-gardens (formerly the province of the Japanese, most of whom were deported during the war).

The Changing Population

In 1956, the Kanaks formed approximately 50% of the population. Twenty years later, in 1976, they formed approximately 42%. New Caledonia's population had virtually doubled, its composition drastically changed.

The 1960s saw a stream of immigrants born in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. These were the "pieds-noirs", French settlers leaving Algeria after independence in 1962. Alan

Ward, in "Labour Policy and Immigration 1945-1955" (1988:99), argues that there were far fewer "pieds-noirs" than supposed, amounting to some 3% of the white population in 1976. He omits those born outside Francophone North Africa. [However, it was said to me that there were plenty of "pieds-noirs" who had come to New Caledonia after a few years residence elsewhere. They formed a noticeable, right-wing, cultural group in Nouméa, identified by their conversations, eating habits, etcetera.]

The real changes came not with the "pieds-noirs" but with the nickel boom of 1969 to 1971. [The boom ended in 1972 from over-production and consequent fall in world market prices, followed by the oil crisis and world recession of 1973 to 1975.] The rise in the price of nickel, and increased production, attracted workers from France, Vietnam, and all over the French Pacific. Most of these people settled in, or around, Nouméa. [During "les événements" they were joined by people from other areas, so that by 1989 almost 60% of New Caledonia's inhabitants, including about 80% of the European population, lived there.]

Between 1969 and 1974, New Caledonia's total population grew by roughly 30%, from 100,579 (1969) to 131,665 (1974). This change in the composition of New Caledonia 's population was not co-incidental but a result of deliberate encouragement as part of French government policy. An office for migration to New Caledonia, a "Bureau des Migrations vers la Nouvelle-Calédonie", was established in

France. In 1972, Roger Laroque, the mayor of Nouméa, announced that more whites were needed: "il faut faire du Blanc". In the same year, Pierre Mesmer, the Prime Minister, wrote to his Secretary of State for overseas territories (DOM-TOM):[1]

"New Caledonia [is] a populated colony, which, while dedicated to multi-coloured multi-racialism, is probably the last non-independent tropical territory to which a developed country can encourage its nationals to migrate. It is thus necessary to seize this last chance to create an additional Francophone territory. The French in Caledonia can only be threatened, except by a world war, by a nationalist demand by the indigenous people supported by some possible allies from other Pacific communities. In the short or the long term, the massive migration of French metropolitan or overseas citizens (Reunion) should allow us to avoid this danger, by maintaining and improving the numerical relationship between communities. In the long term, the nationalist demand of the

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1 "La Nouvelle-Calédonie, colonie de peuplement, bien que vouée a la bigarrure multiraciale, est probablement le dernier territoire tropical non indépendant au monde où un pays developpé puisse faire émigrer ses ressortissants. Il faut donc saisir cette chance ultime de créer un pays francophone supplémentaire. La presence française en Calédonie ne peut être menacée sauf guerre, que par une revendication nationaliste de populations autochtones appuyées par quelques alliés éventuels dans d'autres communautés ethniques venant du Pacifique. A court ou à moyen terme, l'immigration massive de citoyens français métropolitains ou originaires des départements d'outre-mer (Réunion), devrait permettre d'éviter ce danger, en maintenant et en ameliorant le rapport numérique des communautés. A long terme, la revendication nationaliste autochtone ne sera evitée que si les communautés non originaires du Pacifique representent une masse démographique majoritaire. . . . Les conditions sont réunies pour que la Calédonie soit dans les vingt ans un petit territoire français prospère comparable au Luxembourg en Europe. Le succès de cette entreprise indispensable au maintien de positions françaises à l'est de Suez depend, entre autres conditions, de notre aptitude a réussir enfin, après tant d'échecs dans notre histoire, une operation de peuplement outre-mer." [Laroque and Mesmer quoted in Isabelle Leblic Les Kanak face au développement 1993:32.]

indigenous people will only be avoided if non-Pacific communities are in the majority. The right conditions exist for New Caledonia to become, in twenty years time, a small, prosperous French territory comparable to Luxembourg in Europe. The success of this undertaking [which is] indispensable to the maintenance of the French position east of Suez, depends, among other requirements, on an ability to at last succeed, after so many reverses in our history, in an operation of overseas colonization." [2]

One possible reading of this last sentence is that New Caledonia should somehow compensate France for the loss of Algeria. If so, Kanak aspirations towards independence could never be accepted as legitimate, so never fulfilled.

From 1956 to 1976, a period of twenty years, the Kanaks became a minority in their own country. At the same time, they were effectively left out of a vast improvement in living standards, from which everyone else benefited. It was this, as much as land rights, as the preservation of custom, "la coutume", or anything else, that fuelled demands for independence.

The rest of this thesis deals with my experiences in Maré and Nouméa, then uses them to look at the interactions of the Kanaks, Caldoches, European, nickel boom and later immigrants, and other ethnic groups. Their presentations of themselves and others form a cultural arena in which specific

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2 This translation is partly mine but mostly Stephen Henningham's: France and the South Pacific (1992:62-63).

groups, described above, try to maintain or improve their political, economic, and social status.

PART 2

FIELDWORK

6

FIELDWORK IN MARÉ

"Imagine yourself suddenly set down by all your gear, alone on a tropical air-strip close to a native village, while the Dornier which has brought you flies away out of sight. Since you take up your abode in the house of some Kanak, in a more distant village, you have nothing to do but start at once on your ethnographic work. Imagine further that you are a beginner, without previous experience, with nothing to guide you and no one to help you. For the Kanak is temporarily absent or else unable or unwilling to waste any of his time on you. This exactly describes my initiation into fieldwork on the north coast of Maré . . . "[1]

I arrived in Maré in the afternoon of Friday 1 March 1991. It was breathlessly humid, a few days before the start of the rainy season. I looked around the long dusty air-strip, the small cement buildings, the crowd of people, with anticipation tinged with apprehension. I was hoping that someone would meet me. I was eager to get into the field. I had already spent eight days in Nouméa, and, before that, three months in Paris.

My arrival in Paris, on an exchange studentship with the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), and my professed desire to do fieldwork in New Caledonia, had been greeted with curiosity and much kindness. People had given

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1 With apologies to Bronislaw Malinowski: Argonauts of the Western Pacific ((1922) 1983:4).

me information on various topics, plus names and addresses to contact in Nouméa, including the ADCK (Agence de développement de la culture kanak) and the Bureau, where their friend Jemes worked, and which co-ordinated the activities of foreign researchers.

I was offered joint funding, with the ESRC, by a French research project, to do fieldwork in Maré. Inspiration came from Reginald Radcliffe-Brown's (1922) The Andaman Islanders, from Catherine Lutz's (1988) Unnatural Emotions and from other ethnographers of emotions in the Pacific. I wanted to do a classic village ethnography, concentrating particularly on rituals, the public display of emotions and the "imponderabilia of actual life." [Malinowski (1922) 1983:18.]

Guy, the project leader, explained that one of his former graduate students, a Canadian called Catherine, had gone to Maré as part of the project. She was interested in myths and oral literature. After two months, she had become very seriously ill and left. She had recovered but not gone back. There was a cultural centre at Maré and she had been doing some part-time work for it. The success of the project partly depended on the goodwill of the Provincial President of the Loyalty Islands, who came from Maré. That meant finding someone to take her place.

I went to see Catherine, who, increasingly distressed, described her time on Maré. When she arrived, she had gone to stay with a man named Emmanuel. He lived at La Roche, near

the aeroport, and was used to accommodating researchers. At first Emmanuel's family had treated her like a tourist, giving her special expensive meals, and refusing to eat with her. Then there was a political meeting at which the President had introduced her, whereupon Jemes, who worked at the Bureau and was a member of the PALIKA, objected to her presence. Then the Kanaks, having accepted her, had tried to pressurize her into doing a different project, which would have taken at least two years, on Maré.

[It was to take me some time to work out exactly what had happened, certain things only becoming evident once I was actually in New Caledonia. This was because in France and New Caledonia people made references to things which they knew about but I didn't, and always gave me simplified versions. When I tried to get more information from Catherine (exactly who had pressurized her? what was the relationship between the provincial government, the cultural centre and Emmanuel?), she became so upset, clearly unable to see the relevance of the information or even why I was asking it, that I had to stop. All that she said to me, in referring to the cultural centre, (giving me the impression that it was by now up and running) was that it wasn't quite finished but that she had used the provincial administration's office at La Roche to do some photo-copying and that the office driver had taken wherever she wanted to go.]

Then she fell ill and nearly died. Other misfortunes had followed. The Kanaks, the people she met, were nice. She

really liked them. But . . .

An awful thing had happened. She had used almost half of all the money she had, the money she had been given for research, to buy food for Emmanuel's family as Guy, her supervisor, had told her to. She constantly went to the shop and bought boxes of groceries, which she would take into the kitchen. It was true that she had the feeling that they didn't like her doing it, although they never said so.

Then one of her family had fallen ill. Catherine had left Maré in a hurry, thinking that she'ld be back. But she had collapsed in the aeroplane, soon after leaving Nouméa. They had taken her off at Los Angeles and hospitalized her. When she finally returned to France, she found that, as soon as she had left, Emmanuel had gone to the provincial administration to demand money for her keep. He had asked, as a daily rate, something approximating the tariff for a tourist hotel in Nouméa. Finally, the President authorized the payment of some money, although not as much as Emmanuel had hoped.

I mentioned this incident to a couple of linguists. Just before I left Paris, they took me aside. Wherever I went, they wouldn't advise Maré. It was a very bad sign when Melanesians demanded money from people. They didn't normally behave like that. Kanak men could be so difficult, although the women were wonderful. How about a little sociological study in Nouméa? Maré was, well, . . . difficult.

I confided my misgivings to Guy. People in Maré were delightful, he said. He'd visited it twice. After all, I had already met the President [2], who was happy for me to go there.

Any little political or financial problems had been sorted out [3], although naturally I should use the utmost tact, and not spend too much time on the cultural centre. I would have to fight for myself. I should go straight there and waste no time in Nouméa, which had nothing to offer. If I really wanted to I could go to Lifou, but it might be awkward to arrange although he knew the Mayor of Lifou, Cono Hamu [4]. No, no, I said, I would go to Maré. [Lifou was already being studied by a student from the Australian National University.]

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2 I met the President while he was on a brief visit to Paris. Having been warned that I should be careful in what I said, I said virtually nothing. He, for his part, said that he understood that I was a student and that I would like to go to Maré? Did I know there was a cultural centre there? He wanted me to give copies of any works I did, any unrecorded myths or legends or interesting details, to the centre, for the archives? Did I have a grant? Yes? Well, he didn't suppose it was very big, was it?

No, I said. He smiled. The conversation ended.

3 People in Paris advised me that on no account should I in any way get involved in the Kanaks' financial or political affairs. Kanaks were always disputing among themselves, they said, but this didn't affect white people and the Kanaks didn't expect them to take sides.

4 Conu Hamu was an enemy of the President, having been defeated by him in the provincial elections. When I arrived in New Caledonia, one of the first television news-pictures I saw was of Conu Hamu being evacuated from Lifou with a police escort, a rice-casserole having smashed open his head. He and his family were consequently exiled from his native district of Gaitcha, by its high chief. Throughout my time in New Caledonia, Lifou was in a state of intermittent violent unrest, with cross-cutting clan and political disputes. Had I allied myself with Conu Hamu, my fieldwork difficulties would probably have been considerably worse.

I stayed four and a half months in Maré, from March to July 1991. I made brief visits to Nouméa and to Vanuatu. The rest of the time I spent in the small village of Gileada, in the district of Si Guahma, the high chiefship of Nidoish Naisseline.

The material I gathered in Maré will be presented elsewhere. Suffice it to say that, although everybody was very kind to me, I quickly found myself caught up in a tangle of political (and financial) issues, which I was unable to straighten out. What I am presenting here is an outline, as any detailed explanations would take over the entire thesis.

I was picked up at the aeroport by Rekab, a retired primary school-teacher in his fifties, whose name I had been given by Jemes. Rekab took me to his house in Gileada. Unlike the dignified, silent Kanaks whom I had read about (see, for example, Alain Rollat (1989) Tjibaou le kanak), Rekab appeared to be in a state of nervous excitation which made him talk incessantly. His French name, he told me, was Narcisse, but I was welcome to call him by his Kanak name, Rekab.

When I arrived at Rekab's house, I asked him how he would like me to pay - with a fixed sum, or with my buying groceries each week? That wasn't necessary, he answered. The Province was going to pay him for my keep. He was an uncle of the President and knew that the President had arranged for me to replace Catherine. He was a friend of Emmanuel's, the President of the Cultural Association and of

its managing committee, the Cultural Committee. It was all arranged. He had often had tourists and other people staying in his house, he had two girls from New Zealand, only the year before. They had stayed two weeks and had loved it. Also, people often visited him because his cousin Léonce who taught at the college at Taramène would pick up tourists and give them a tour of the island, stopping at Rekab's house so that they could buy sea-shells, and other curios.

The upshot of this conversation was that I was left with the impression that Rekab ran a sort of guesthouse (which was false) and that he was very interested in making money (which was true).

To my surprise, a few days after my arrival, Rekab began to address me in an insulting manner, to pressurize me and shout orders at me in public, although I was a paying guest. A power struggle developed in which little was said but in which Rekab, by his manner, appeared to be trying to push me to see how far he could go. [Presumably, so that he could be seen to be exerting authority over a white person.] His wife Ket was away, visiting their children, five of whom were at school or elsewhere in Nouméa, while the two youngest daughters, aged eight and thirteen, remained at home. I willingly did a limited amount of housework and child-care but resisted attempts to make me do more, leaving Rekab to do the cooking. On the one occasion that I prepared a meal, he informed me that he didn't like it and wasn't going to eat it.

I felt that I was in no position to refuse to co-operate, unless I left Maré sooner than the initial three weeks upon which we had agreed. Despite some misgivings, once the three weeks were over, I spent two weeks in a hotel in Nouméa, sorting out my bank account, and then returned. Rekab's behaviour, I told myself, was because he was nervous, unused to foreigners, and his wife was away. Things would be better now that she was back.

Ket's presence meant that the housework lessened but Rekab's autocratic manner did not. He constantly interrogated me about my whereabouts, whenever I left the house. He ignored anything I said about my fieldwork project: there was no need for me to explain anything, he knew all about it. The President had spoken. Rekab and Emmanuel were in charge of me for I had been recruited by the Province to gather material for the cultural centre. The cultural centre was being set up by the Province to make money from tourists. For a start, I could abandon any idea of writing books (I had told him that I was writing a thesis, which was a sort of book) and make videos instead. Videos, not books, were what Kanaks, wanted.

Vainly I protested that there had been a misunderstanding, I didn't have a video camera, I was a student from London University, I had a study grant from Paris: of course, I would be happy to donate copies of my work to the cultural centre but I was in charge of my own work. I was not collecting myths, unlike Catherine, because my interests were not the same as hers. In any case, Père Dubois (see Chapter 7)

had already recorded and published myths. [To which Rekab replied that this was true, but that there were plenty of unpublished myths left over.] I answered to Paris and to London University, not to him. I would be happy to co-operate with the cultural centre, and its Cultural Association, when the centre was completed (it had not yet been built), but . . .

But, but . . . my words fell on deaf ears. I would have left almost as soon as I arrived had I not believed: first, that good anthropologists never left the field; and second, that any problems would sort themselves out (I dared not believe otherwise). Also, I had no transport of my own. [Rekab lived about thirty-five kilometres from the aeroport, all the other transport in the village belonged to his close relatives, and there were no telephones with which to make alternative arrangements.] However, there was one overriding reason for me to stay: the project. Rekab was related to the President, and, as I slowly discovered, several of the most prominent politicians in the country.

Rekab had a framed photograph, of himself with the President, on his television set. He was a distant cousin or uncle of the President. [He made the relationship seem a little closer than it was.] He was a dear friend, and cousin, of Yeiwené Yeiwené, the previous Provincial President, after whom the cultural centre was to be named. Yeiwené Yeiwené was a well-known, long-time, political activist who had been assassinated alongside Jean-Marie Tjibaou. Rekab was a cousin of Yann-Céléné Uregei, founder of the FULK. He was a

first cousin of Jemes, of the PALIKA, who was in charge of foreign researchers at the Bureau. He was a subject of (and minor political irritation to) Nidoish Naisseline of the LKS. He was leader of the UC in Gileada. He was, or had been, a member, and, or, office-holder of virtually every religious, sporting, social, youth, or other association in Maré.

Rekab, in short, had contacts everywhere, and even though deeply unpopular with several people, he was not someone to fall out with. His main interests in life were religion, politics, and money.

Rekab's fondness for religion took the form of reading compilations from the Bible and participating in the Evangelical Church's activities. The Evangelical Church was one of Maré's most important social organizations. Rekab's special interest was youth: he was (the oldest ever) President of Maré's church youth association; and alcohol: he would campaign and demonstrate with others about the evils of alcohol, and kept a stack of banners in his house. Almost the very first question he asked me was, did I drink?

I assured him I didn't, carefully qualifying it by saying that sometimes I had a glass of beer or wine with a meal. Rekab seemed to accept this but would occasionally imply that I did. [For example, on one occasion he saw me drinking a tonic water with his teenage daughter Imogine and screamed that it was alcohol and that I had introduced his daughter to drink.] Yet, as time progressed, it was obvious that, if his behaviour

were annoying me, mine was annoying him, and that, nevertheless, we were both trying to get on with each other. After all, Rekab had done a lot for me. He had given me a tour of the island, he had taken me to various festivities. He had introduced me to numerous people. I had visited Vanuatu with a group from the village. All his family, including his brother Jese, the village chief, had been very kind, even though they refused to answer any of my questions. [I should ask Rekab, they said, he was in charge of me.] I was in an invidious position, for if he were the host, I was the guest, and I was horribly conscious of my behaviour being wrong (exactly how, I was not able to work out).

Finally, after four and a half months, Rekab announced that I was going to live with "Patate" (nicknamed "Spud") at Cengeite, sixty kilometres away. The Cultural Committee, of the Cultural Association (which had pressurised Catherine, and of which I eventually discovered Rekab to be a member) had decreed it so.

"Patate", the Cultural Committee, and Rekab, had been involved in the hasty departure of a French ethno-musicologist, who had left Maré some two years previously. [I was told, that, among other things, he was so furious with Rekab that he threatened to kill him.] The ethno-musicologist had been involved in research, and in a musical project with local children. He had been living happily at Cengeite, when the Cultural Committee decided that he should move (apparently because they wanted him to work in a different

area of Maré; also, it was said, because another member of the committee felt that it was his turn to receive some rent money). The ethno-musicologist refused. First he was beaten up, and then he received death threats. Anxious for the safety of his wife and children, he left.

I told Rekab that I couldn't go to Cengeite as I needed to go to Nouméa, for blood tests. [I had been ill and my hair was falling out.] Rekab lost his temper. After pushing and pulling me, and grabbing at my throat, he went for my face with a multi-spiked shell (lambis lambis). It was one and a half times the size of my hand and very heavy. It would have blinded me in the right eye and broken my cheek and jaw bones. I said that if he hit me he would have a prison sentence. His sister-in-law, who was there, grabbed him from behind. Rekab was incandescent with rage. Prison? he yelled. This was Maré, not Nouméa! I was not to argue but to obey him.

Afterwards, he apologised. He was sorry he had lost his temper, but I was so annoying. Didn't I realize that now I was here I could forget any ideas about writing books for London University? I was only a girl and I had come to work for the cultural centre. It was he, and the members of the committee, who would tell me what to do.

I was going to Nouméa, I said and would sort things out there.

When I arrived in Nouméa, I went to a hotel for a couple

of days, and then moved into the "auberge de jeunesse".

The story of my fieldwork in Maré concludes in "Conclusions".

7

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF MARÉ

Methodology

From the first few weeks of my stay in Maré, I have a beautiful pile of fieldnotes, carefully written and indexed. Afterwards, they degenerate into scrawls, written hastily and in secret on torn and battered paper. These are augmented with letters, other documents, typed reports, originals and carbons, draft and final versions. When touched, this mass of material oozes comments on sickness, insect bites, wounds; politics, intrigue, money, threats, and sorcery: a seeping paranoia which uncannily mirrors my fieldwork experiences. Even at a distance, it makes me want to scream. Yet it confirms that, despite my naivety, I was on the right track. In March 1991 I wrote that I had remarked to Rekab's brother, Alceste, who was visiting us, that I thought Maré was "assez tranquille": he replied that Maré was like still waters with sharks.

If I subtract all my visits to Nouméa and add up all the days I spent in Maré itself they total about five months, scattered throughout my time in New Caledonia. This was not nearly long enough on which to base a detailed, sound analysis of a society whose language I did not speak and in which I was using a second language to ask about matters discussed in a third, which no one wished to repeat. It is, however, long enough to record my impressions and to comment on my own experiences.

I had imagined, before I did fieldwork, that it would be possible to do a study of everyday life on Maré without over-intruding into people's lives and while still respecting any secrets they might have. This proved impossible. Maré, like many other New Caledonian and Melanesian societies, is organized around secrecy, interlocking supernatural-cum-customary knowledge and power which are linked to particular places and clan origin myths. These can only be disclosed by those authorized to do so: to appropriate people, who do not include strange females claiming to be students writing books.

It is very difficult, given the situation in which I found myself, to know how one should discuss people who do not wish to be written about. The brevity of these two chapters on Maré comes partly from the difficulty of bringing into focus material which might otherwise be construed as sensationalist or damaging. Any counter-balance would require a very detailed and lengthy exposition of the issues at stake, which would distort the focus of this thesis. The only fieldwork experience which appears similar to mine is Jean Briggs's account of her days with the Utkuhikhalingmiut Eskimos (Never in Anger 1970). In it, she shows how her presence clearly became intolerable to the family she was staying with, as mine did to Rekab's.

Rekab's larger family, particularly his brother Jese the village chief and his wife Esetera, were very kind to me. In a sense they accepted me under false pretences, as Rekab informed them that officially I was working for the cultural

centre but was effectively working for him; despite my constant repetition that I was a student from London University who was writing a book about Maré. I am sure that they had misgivings, and that, on one level, they tolerated me because they were at a loss to know what else to do (as I was clearly too stupid and impolite to understand that I had outstayed my welcome). Unlike, Briggs, the hints made to me were not always subtle but people were rarely rude to me. Usually, they just ignored me, behaviour which I now see as a normal Kanak response to intrusive white people.

As stated in the Preface, I hope that I shall eventually have the leisure to refine my material, and present it elsewhere. My description of Maré's social organization, below, concentrating on the reproductive strategies of the extended family, will I hope, offend nobody. I have not included a description of the village of Gileada as an accurate one would make it instantly recognizable to anyone familiar with the island.

After my first few weeks in Gileada, not having found anyone to teach me Nengone, I decided to teach myself with an unpublished manuscript which I had in my possession. To my initial surprise and disappointment, my attempts to learn Nengone were greeted with such intense hostility by both Rekab and his wife Ket that I decided to stop (believing that I could start again later). Ket told me that I could communicate perfectly well in French, so there was no reason to use anything else. With hindsight, I can see that Rekab would have

been blamed for allowing me to acquire any secrets which I might reveal. At the time, I took it as yet another example of how Rekab, for reasons best known to himself, was trying to ruin my fieldwork.

People, including Rekab, were extremely suspicious whenever I took fieldnotes: when I did not, they wondered what I was up to. As Rekab said to me, after he tried to hit me, by way of explanatory apology, people in Maré were distrustful "Ici les gens se méfient beaucoup". He had earlier told me that people in Maré liked to keep secrets: once Ket remarked, in another context, that when people in Maré did something bad, they didn't own up to it. I eventually took to writing secretly, if at all, as it was only when I appeared uninterested that people told me things.

My main sources of information on Maré, prior to going there, were the works of the missionary ethnographer Dubois (Gens de Maré 1984, and many others). There were also the comments of the linguists and other people whom I had met in Paris. From Guy I had received a glowing description: from others a cautious one. As several people were to tell me, Kanaks and Europeans, the Maréans were tough. If there were any trouble in New Caledonia, you would expect it to come from Maré. It was amazing that the 1988 hostage crisis had happened in Ouvéa, instead of Maré (see Chapter 2).

Dubois first arrived in Maré in 1939 and left in 1967, spending a total of twenty-five years on his researches. His

original approach and fascinating complexity of detail mean that many of them are difficult to analyze in depth without a good knowledge of Nengone. Much of his work reads like highly polished fieldnotes. It contrasts markedly with the solitary volume produced by Emma Hadfield, the wife of the missionary James Hadfield of Lifou. It was her delightful and readable Among the Natives of the Loyalty Group (1920) that first attracted me to New Caledonia.

But of the two authors, it is Dubois who is the heavyweight ethnographer. I often found correspondences between what Hadfield wrote and what I observed. Yet once again there emerge two different views of the Kanaks, an issue already discussed in Chapter 3. This may be partly a question of temperament and partly a question of field sites. A sunny equanimity shines through Hadfield's work, who concentrates on Ouvéa and Lifou, ignoring Maré. Sour notes, and a grim resilience, occasionally surface in Dubois's, something which puzzled me when I first read it, before going to New Caledonia. Dubois's position as a Catholic priest, used to the confessional, his firm belief in the Devil, and numerous references to sorcery, may account for this lack of sentimentality. My impressions were confirmed when he kindly allowed me to interview him in Paris, prior to my departure for the field.

Père Dubois was greatly admired by Emmanuel but seemed to be thoroughly disliked by Rekab and virtually everyone else whom I spoke to. Père Dubois believed that his

research was a gift for the future, a legacy. One day, the Kanaks would appreciate his works on Maré, because they described their heritage. The Kanaks believed that he had betrayed their clan secrets, especially as he had published the full names of his unfortunate informants. On the other hand, nobody claimed to have read his books - they just knew that he had done this. In addition, with the exception of Emmanuel, all the Kanaks I spoke to, including Rekab, were Protestants of the Si Guahma, the hereditary enemies of the Catholics at La Roche.

My first visit to the Catholic mission at La Roche was when Rekab took me on an initial tour of the island, soon after my arrival. So struck was I, by its isolated smallness and desolate aspect under a flat grey sky, that any criticisms disappeared under the thought of those years and years of labour, fatigued and writing by lamplight, in a mission with minimal communication with the outside world. Obviously uneasy in this Catholic enclave, Rekab introduced me to one of Père Dubois's successors, then promptly told me that he drank. How cruel, I thought, to send someone who needed support to Maré, away from Nouméa, even if what Rekab said was true. [I have no evidence that it was.]

This sudden sense of shock and desolation came again when, some months later, I saw the spot where the two Samoan "teachers" had landed through the broken reef at Ro, to a cove with a wall of short cliffs. I thought that I had come to a terrible place. Later, just before I left New Caledonia for

good, Jese told me how (in 1841) the Samoans had tried to land at Thogone, but had been unsuccessful: how it was a good thing because they would have been killed; but how after they landed at Ro they were seen by two old men (elders) who brought them to be put to the test by all the sorcerers; but nothing worked and so they were allowed to live and the Gospel came to Maré [This story is confirmed by several written accounts, such as Jean Hmae's "Rekoko: the New Yams Feast on Maré" 1986: 94-95: I doubt that Jese had read them.] I went cold. I remembered the story of Ta'unga (the famous Rarotongan "teacher"), his canoe driving through the gaps in the same reef, calling "I know the true God" so that his life was spared and he was brought to the "teachers".

Without wishing to over-dramatize the effects of landscape and narrative upon the imagination of the ethnographer, these stories point to what I consider to be the key factor in any anthropological study of Maré - the group as a means of survival. Life is already so much more safe and comfortable than in the past that this need is rapidly changing, and may seem irrelevant to any future anthropologist. The social institutions of Maré, at the time of fieldwork, still reflected this need. It is this fundamental premise that underlies the following, very broad, kinship-based analysis, based principally on my own field observations. The categories of environment, religion, kinship, etcetera merge untidily into each other and are only presented in this way because of the constraints of the text.

The two sides of Maréan life, the dark and the light, the warmth, generosity, and solidarity of its people underlain by violence, jealousies, resentments and sorceries, reflect their struggle for limited resources on a coral island. Water comes from rain-filled aquifers and access to these aquifers, underground pools and lakes, is essential for human life. Despite the use of micro-cisterns (hollows cut into palm trees) fights for land can be traced to fights for water; access to land and water gives power to those with rights of ownership and subordinates others. It is only recently that electricity and the electrical pumping of water came to Maré and even so, when I was there, it sometimes broke down and people would have to rely on cisterns. [A few villages had not yet been electrified when I was there but I am not sure whether they had pumped water.] Water, land fertility (coral islands have very few minerals in the soil - hence few minerals in food crops, and mineral deficiencies among their inhabitants), sources of protein (fish, seafood, birds, meat: Maré's only indigenous mammals were the rat and the flying-fox): all these formed a harsh environment where only the fit survived and where safety lay in the protection of the group. The old controlled the young (and still do to a very large extent) because it was on the young people's physical labour, reproductive and fighting skills, that the survival of the group (including the old) depended. Maré's myths and legends, documented by Dubois, who generally believes their tales of war and massacre to have a historical basis, seem to reflect this. [All of which is outside the scope of this thesis: however, Jese told me something which would confirm

Dubois's belief.]

The frequent indigenous warfare of the last centuries varied in intensity, showing that both conflict and co-operation were strategically employed by the warring clans. In Maré, Clausewitz's dictum that war is a continuation of politics by other means should perhaps add sorcery to politics. Today both are employed although, as Rekab said to me, sorcery is no longer quite as powerful as it once was. The effects of secular education and other forms of rationalism, of electric light and a lessening of creepy experiences in the dark, plus the adoption of Christianity, combine to modify its effects: or so it would seem. Yet I heard a few stories of "le boucan", from Kanaks in their twenties: as in the story of Athalie, a woman in the village, who had been bewitched by her sisters-in-law, for they came from different tribes and were jealous of her beauty. People would not discuss such things with me, or, if I were present, they would glance significantly at me and carry on the conversation in Nengone: of which I could grasp only a hazy outline. I was assured by the linguists whom I had met in Paris that the Kanaks discussed such things incessantly: "Ils ne parlent que de ça!"

Sorcery, then, is a means of power, aggression and protection against others but it is, if not neutralized, counter-balanced by Christianity. Religious belief and practice, Christianity in its Protestant and Catholic versions, offers a certain protection against supernatural aggression. Very rarely a pastor will practice black magic, the powers of which

are acquired by killing members of one's own family. Usually, any magical activity by a pastor, or more likely a deacon, "drikon", is of a beneficial, healing nature. Indigenous, medically-trained, male nurses often double as traditional healers, commonly known throughout New Caledonia as "les guérisseurs".

Religious discourse is a means of political mediation between warring groups and between the Melanesian and European worlds. It is this which underlies the Kanaks' oft-repeated assertion that the Gospel brought them love, "l'Évangile nous a apporté l'amour." The physiological and psychological effects of continuous warfare are outside the scope of this thesis but the blessings of peace are indisputable. Coral islands are essentially hollow. The area where I stayed was riddled with deep holes, covered by bushes, by thick scrub; the sea-shore was full of coves, caves, grey needles of dried-out coral, only partly worn down by sand and water. I had never before seen such a place for ambushes, for hedge warfare, where it would be so easy to hide and surprise one's enemy. Anyone fearing attack would find themselves in a continuous state of nervous tension (as I was, on the few occasions that I wandered around alone).

Conversion to Christianity and its eventual internalization not only ended fears of attack but allowed the possibility of a stable future for one's descendants.

Children are considered the ultimate good. They

strengthen the group, provide care for parents in old age, ensure the survival of their father's name and their mother's clan. When no children are born, family bonds are strengthened by adoption. Adoption is very widespread (I was told that up to one-third of the children of Maré were adopted) but adoption is of various kinds. Children go to live with their relatives without ever being formally adopted, either because their own family is large, and, or, poor: or because the relative needs help or support (for example, one girl of fifteen lived with her grandmother because her grandfather was crippled and her grandmother needed help in the house). Barren couples are usually given at least one child by their relatives: orphaned or motherless children are usually adopted by some member of the close or extended family. [For example, Jese and Esetera had no children of their own but four adopted ones: three elder daughters, including a niece left motherless as a baby, and a young son. The son was a nephew, given by Jese's younger brother Amosa, so that Jese would have a son of his own to succeed him as chief of the village.] Illegitimate children are often adopted and may stay with their birth mother up to the age of five or so. They may be adopted by unmarried men, usually uncles. For example, I knew one family in which an illegitimate baby was adopted by her young unmarried uncle, soon after birth. She lived with her birth mother until the age of five, when her uncle married and she went to live with him and his new wife, whom she called Mother. On another occasion, I witnessed the funeral of a little boy drowned in a water cistern. His weeping young unmarried mother, with whom he lived, was ignored while sympathy and condolences

were showered on his adopted parents, with whom he had not yet been sent to live.

Adoption was and is also used (perhaps less now than in the past, as marriage choices are changing) to compensate for the exchange of women in marriage between various clans - when no young woman is forthcoming, a child may be adopted instead.

Maré, and the Kanak world in general, is a place where discourses of kinship ties and brotherly love are undercut by traditional supernatural enmities (the word supernatural may seem exaggerated: I am referring here to the secret knowledge which allows for the practice of sorcery). This is because clan descent comes from the mother, so that the supernatural powers of parents differ. Mother and father are from different clans: some clans are hereditary enemies of one another. This means that adult men and women, and older boys and girls, avoid each other, even if they are brothers and sisters. People associate with same sex groups. It is for this reason that women were not trusted in the past and still are not: because they leave their natal families to live with strangers, to whom they may betray family secrets which will destroy their brothers. It is also for this reason that women were traditionally used as mediators in time of war (see Chapter 3). [All this casts an interesting light on the rôle of the strange, single, female ethnographer.] The customary rôles and powers of maternal uncles and paternal aunts are related to this: paternal uncles and maternal aunts do not have the same

customary (and supernatural) powers.

The result is that women are feared and respected by men for their supernatural powers, particularly their powers of reproduction (I am not arguing, à la Malinowski, that men are physiologically ignorant; nor that they see their own supernatural powers as negligible). Women are publicly subordinate to men, and must sit in their presence (ie be phsycially lower than they are).

[Women would constantly tug at my skirt to make me sit down if, at any public event, I stood in the presence of a man. This, I once heard, was the reason why Kanak women on the mainland should ride neither horses nor bicycles: a woman should not be higher than a man. This may be the reason why it was not considered quite proper for girls and women to ride bicycles in Maré: although girls would borrow my bicycle to ride through the village. People kept telling me that it wasn't forbidden (but one woman implied that it had been forbidden in the past), it just wasn't done. However, about six months before I left New Caledonia, the Territory was swept by an enthusiasm for mountain bikes and several young Maréan girls were allowed to have them.]

Despite this public subordination, women have considerable power in private and in the home, although theoretically men are still considered to be in charge. The degree of sexual equality in the home varies from household to household. In public, men made the decisions but they rely on

receiving the public assent of women (with whom the issues had usually been discussed): without women's assent, mens' plans would grind to a halt.

Once married, women are of little further interest to their natal families. Once, when I was in Nouméa, one of Alceste's married nieces had a baby at a nearby hospital. When I asked whether he (a paternal uncle) or his wife were going to see her and the baby, he indignantly rejected the idea, as she was no longer part of their family and so of no further interest: although he added that her mother might go to see her, if she so wished.

Had the baby been illegitimate, it would have belonged to the mother's natal family (although a civil wedding in the town-hall, the "mairie", and a promise to marry the mother according to custom would be taken as an indication of the father's future rights over the child, to be realized at a future date). But, even if children are officially a blessing, illegitimate ones are not always greeted with delight (see Chapter 21). If no promise of marriage is forthcoming, the baby may well be adopted by some other member of the mother's family. Sexual mores are changing and an illegitimate baby is no longer the disgrace it once was (provided that there is a civil wedding, that the father and his family are suitably apologetic, and promise an eventual customary ceremony). Nevertheless, it is not the proper way to do things, even when young people present their elders with a fait accompli.

Maré is dominated by the politics of the marriage alliance - reproduction which strengthens the group. In recent years, politics and employment in a wider, European-dominated, world provide opportunities for individual advancement without an absolute reliance on the kingroup. Nevertheless, the group (the extended family, the tribe, all Maréans together, opposed to people from other places) dominates. The traditional dish "bougna" - yams, coconut milk, flying-fox, fish, and/or other ingredients, cooked in an earth oven - has a sexual significance and is always made for any important occasion, to be eaten in a group. To eat together, "manger ensemble", is a sign of unity and peace-making, as eating the same food over time mean that people's substances gradually become alike.

Yams, the staple food, the source of life, symbols both of the person and of male reproduction, are ceremonially exchanged between men, especially at weddings. At weddings, an enormous amount of goods and money is distributed between the two families, most of it going from the family of the groom to the family of the bride. In Maré today, young people are rarely married off to complete strangers but they have what are, if not arranged marriages, approved ones. Young men are not supposed to marry until they have finished their military service (compulsory for Kanaks, as for other French citizens) so they rarely marry before the age of twenty, at the earliest. Girls can marry at fifteen but are expected to wait until they have finished school. Women are not supposed to marry younger men, unless the age difference is one of months

rather than years. Virtually all men marry but some unfortunate women never do. Women are not supposed to take the sexual initiative (although I am sure they do: as they sometimes do in myths). An unmarried woman has a miserable life because she is not adult and cannot socialize with married women and participate in adult activities: she has to remain in the company of teenagers, without being one (rules that Rekab tried to apply to me). [These rules are enforced with various degrees of severity: once a woman is clearly middle-aged, then post-menopausal, her unmarried state is glossed over.] Illegitimate or adopted children give an unmarried woman some measure of adulthood, but she lacks the dignity of a married woman with a family.

Marriage in Maré is always a civil wedding accompanied by an indigenous customary church ceremony, Catholic or Protestant. [Departures from this rule are extremely rare and will usually allow some members of the groom's extended family to refuse to make the customary contribution to the family of the bride, on the grounds of disrespect and, or, irreligiosity.] The bride is chosen, or at least vetted, by the young man's mother and maternal aunts, who will propose such and such a young woman to him. If he makes his own choice, he must be careful to secure the consent of both families, otherwise a customary marriage is impossible. The approval of the young man's maternal uncle is needed for marriage. Strictly speaking, the eldest must always be married first: for both young men and young women there is an order of precedence. One of Jese's adopted daughters, Clotilde, had a

baby daughter, and was legally married to a young man from the island of Tiga. His maternal uncle, however, despite the urging of Jese and Esetera (who, kind as they were, yet disliked the situation) refused to allow them to marry, grimly citing those who had precedence (effectively a three to five years wait). Finally, however, he agreed to cut it down to two.

The amount of money given for a bride reflects prestige on both families and represents an enormous effort by the of the groom's family. For example, Rekab's eldest daughter Kezia, twenty-two years old, already had three little girls with the young man who lived next door (to whom she was legally married). Yet they were not allowed to live together, and her daughters theoretically belonged to Rekab, until her customary marriage. Her husband, Mataio, came from a poor family with a small kindred: it took four years for his family to raise enough money to fulfil the promise of customary marriage. The amount given for Kezia was not in any way exceptional. Yet Rekab's share, as father of the bride, was enough for him to buy a new Toyota truck.

As can be seen, and will be shown in later chapters, the group predominates in Kanak life. During my stay in Maré, I made the mistake of under-estimating how much I was expected to conform, and this doubtless aggravated the situation.

Rekab illustrates the classical anthropological dilemma of the gate-keeper who refuses to let the ethnographer get on

with research: but although most published anthropological accounts show how the researcher overcame this, I must confess to failure. But it was a failure which gave me some interesting insights into what Maré was like and paved the way to a more profound understanding of New Caledonia in general. As I found out, factionalism, discord and collective mentalities were not confined to the Kanaks but were endemic in New Caledonian life.

8

CULTURE SHOCK

When I left Maré my thoughts got stuck into logical little boxes. In Nouméa, I sweated awake at night as if trying to play some endless game, endless chess computer programme, against an opponent whose moves I could not predict and whose rules and motives I had no authoritative knowledge of. I had finally escaped Rekab's clutches but underneath this short-lived exultation I was in a state of shock. I had never heard of anybody who had been forced to leave the field, nor of any experiences similar to mine. On the surface, the whole affair seemed to be a triviality that could easily be resolved. I was almost sure that the right answer existed, if only I could find it - the solution that would offend nobody, placate everybody - the perfect intellectual form which could be apprehended by question and answer and the rigorous elimination of unviable possibilities. If I could find the right person to discuss the situation with, my options would clarify and the problems disappear. Unfortunately, as I gradually came to realize, such a person did not exist. Everybody whom I had met, who was likely to have a good understanding of what was at stake, was caught up in a social network whose members had a direct or indirect interest in my actions. Whatever I did, whoever I confided in, might result in unpleasantness of one kind or another. It was a variant of chaos theory - a casual remark might unleash a hurricane.

In retrospect, I realize that this was a reaction from my

childhood, when the absolute necessity of politeness, neutrality, and social harmony had been deeply impressed upon me. Whatever I did - whether I stayed in Maré or went elsewhere - was sure to offend someone. As one door opened, another one closed. It took me a long time to realize that New Caledonia's antagonism and divisiveness, the micro-factions of which I was becoming so aware, were, in a sense, more to do with style, and certain forms of behaviour, than actual psychological content. Despite their initial masking, I eventually saw that these antagonisms and rivalry were structural, rather than personal: the everyday result of struggle on a small island with limited resources. They were as much to do with groups as with individuals.

As it was, I began to experience a general inability to relax and take people's remarks at face value. One or two incidents increased my anxiety. Why had some strange old men, who somehow knew my name, yelled at me on the streets of Nouméa? Why had another, with his friend, accosted me and told me that I was going to live with him? Would Rekab and the Cultural Committee attempt to contact me? [They didn't.]

I began to experience a chronic tension mixed with shame at my psychological weakness, anger and bewilderment. Although I now recognize this as a fieldwork commonplace, at the time I thought that my experience was unique. I was undergoing "culture shock", a term credited to Ruth Benedict (Peggy Golde in "Introduction" to Golde 1986:11) and its unlovely by-product, stress leading to burn-out (see Hazel

Hitson Weidman on anxiety and tension in the field, in "Ambivalence in the Field" in Golde 1986: 252-3, 260). Adrian Bochner and Stephen Furnham, in Culture Shock (1986: 47-9) list Oberg's six aspects of culture shock, namely strain, deprivation, rejection, confusion, anxiety, impotence, and describe it in these terms:

"Researchers since Oberg have seen culture shock as a normal reaction, as part of the routine process of adaptation to the cultural stress and the manifestation of the longing for a more predictable, stable and understandable environment...culture shock is a stress reaction where salient psychological and physical rewards are generally uncertain and hence difficult to control or predict. Thus a person is anxious, confused and apparently apathetic until he or she has had time to develop a new set of cognitive constructs to understand and enact the appropriate behaviour...Observers have pointed to a continuous general "free-floating" anxiety which affects normal behaviour..."

Golde in Golde (1986:5) refers to Oberg's (1954) description of the four stages of culture shock: honeymoon, crisis, culture learning, culture learnt (ie appropriate patterns of behaviour developed for both home and new cultures). My own experiences corresponded roughly to this but I should add that they were jumbled together, so that some degree of crisis was more or less continuous, while the honeymoon, culture learning, and culture learnt, stages recurred intermittently throughout my stay in New Caledonia.

The stress reactions I underwent are accurately depicted by Richard Brislin, Kenneth Cushner, Craig Cherrie, and Mahealani Yong in Intercultural Interactions (1986), their study of some common experiences of overseas sojourners: (1986:244) stress leading to burn-out is caused by high expectations coupled with lack of control over goal attainment; (1986:257) high anxiety is the result of insufficient knowledge (ambiguity); (1986:249) emotional over-reactions are often caused by disconfirmed expectations - sojourners want to do well, so, when they encounter difficulties "it is not the difficulty itself to which they are reacting but rather to the contrast between their expectation and the problem which prevents the achievement of that expectation...if people have a strong expectation, then any deviation from it is seen as greater than it really is."

Although all this will be discussed in more detail later, for most of my time in the hostel I felt corroded by shame and anxiety. The shame was increased by the knowledge that absence from the field (at this time I still thought Maré was the "real" field) was indubitable proof of not being "the Right Stuff" (a term originally coined by Theodore Roosevelt, then used by Tom Wolfe for NASA astronauts, but picked up in anthropology: see Jean Jackson "On Trying to be an Amazon" in Conaway and Whitehead 1986: 263). At the same time I was angry because I felt myself to have done nothing wrong; and bewildered because I could not understand why Rekab refused to listen to me and accept that my projects were not identical

with his. I had, I thought, tried hard to be pleasant, in the face of the most extreme provocation (it now strikes me that Rekab was probably thinking exactly the same thing).

Later I accepted that the rights and wrongs of the matter were irrelevant, for I was the stranger and disrupter of his household, and should therefore have given way during any dispute or left his house. [A similar point is made by Jean L. Briggs, in "Kapluna Daughter" (Briggs in Golde 1986: 20, 26), recounting how her Utkuhiksalingmiut Eskimo hosts put themselves out to accommodate her, and the poor return she made to her hosts for their hospitality towards her.] Yet at the time I failed to see this. Rekab had been paid for lodging me: it did not occur to me that the upheaval and ill-feeling caused by my presence was perhaps greater than the satisfaction afforded by an extra income.

The uneasy dejection into which I was cast, although initially relieved by social activity, took hold with my several fruitless attempts to return to Maré (discussed later) and stopped me from regarding either Nouméa or the hostel as a proper field for my research activities.

Nevertheless, as I made friends with the hostellers, I began to see New Caledonia with new eyes, theirs. Writing this has made the hostellers and the Kanaks seem equally real to me. All this is discussed in more detail later, yet it seems strange that I initially dismissed the hostel as a field of enquiry: but it was a refuge I wanted, not new projects. The

European aspects of Nouméa, wildly exaggerated in holiday brochures as the Paris of the South Pacific, were recognised by me in a way that Maré was not. While realising it to be a social construction, I nevertheless felt strongly that studying Maré, as the unfamiliar Other, was more worthwhile because it was somehow more real. As Michael Taussig puts it in Mimesis and Alterity, (1993:xv-xvii) "we nevertheless get on with living, pretending - thanks to the mimetic faculty - that we live facts, not fictions....Some force impels us to keep the show on the road...a devouring force comes at us...seducing us by playing on our yearning for the true real." Yet I initially apprehended Maré as the really real. For me, a Western townee, life with people who functioned largely without the professional intermediaries of the social division of labour, and consequent commodity fetishism: country people, most of whom built their own houses, drank their own rainwater, disposed of their own rubbish and sewage, grew, caught, bred, and fished for, much of their food, killed their own animals, buried their own dead, cured their own ills (as far as possible) with plants found in their gardens and the forest; life with such people was indeed more "whole", "real", and exotic than life in towns, for it emphasised the ways in which man, like any other animal, depends on other species and his own activities for survival. If I no longer feel this way, it is because time, distance, and the act of writing, have incorporated new insights, bringing my experiences in New Caledonia into a unified whole.

PART 3

THE HOSTEL AND ITS INHABITANTS

"Why like fine-fellows are we ever scheming,
We short-lived mortals?
Why so fond of climates
Warmed by new suns?
O, who that runs from home, can
Run from himself too?"

"Ease is the pray'r of him, who, in a whaleboat ..."
Thomas Morris (1796)
in Crossley-Holland 1989: 366-67:

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THE HOSTEL

The hostel lay in a valley, clumped beneath the brow of a hill. A series of stark rectangular buildings, it was prettified by the hedges, twining flowers, and sparsely treed hillside that surrounded it.

A Swiss-chalet type main block led into a large room with a ping-pong table and wooden lockers. A rickety wooden staircase led to a loft which contained washing lines, rat poison, and a few suitcases, plus dirty rolls of plastic and some frayed mats. This, and a bench in the ping-pong room, were among the favourite sleeping-places of Sydney the cat. The chalet backed onto a series of rooms, a refectory with faded posters, wooden benches and tables: a kitchen with a large, glass-doored, refrigerator, two ancient and hideously encrusted gas stoves, a sink, wooden lockers, a table , bench and chairs. Next to it was a room which was always kept locked, being reserved for groups of school-children and visiting dignitaries. On either side were decrepit dormitories and a televison room, which as dusk fell, filled with mosquitoes - opposite were an old sink and what had once been male and female showers and lavatories. A small patch of straggling grass was ornamented by a multi-stranded, pole-supported clothes dryer.

During the nearly two years that I was there the facilities steadily improved: the locked room became a new

kitchen, the dormitories were redecorated, part of the washing block became a laundry room and the rest was destined for an office, a luggage room and a shop. A patio was cemented over the grass, the washing lines banished to the back of the old dormitories, and by the time I left, everything smelled of new paint and increasing prices. Only the huge new dormitory block, cyclone-proof (up to winds of 200 km. an hour, but never tested) remained unchanged. In front of this block was a large green lawn, beshrubbed with yellow, red, or green leaves, and surrounded by a railing: underneath was a series of overgrown terraces leading down to the Cathedral: directly ahead were the small boats of the marina, where north-west light splashed over the blue water, with sunsets over the series of hilltops to the right and left. On one side the town stretched behind the hill towards Vallée des Colons and the Anse Vata: on the other the view was blocked off by the steep slopes of lawn, and wire fence surrounding the managers' small oblong house. It was here that Elisabeth and Francis lived, with Sydney, and Milou, Francis's elderly Alsatian bitch.

The hostel had been built in the early 1970s and had originally consisted of two dormitories, male and female, with bunk-beds for about fourteen people, offering minimal toilet and cooking facilities. Since then, it had vastly expanded, and could, while I was there, accommodate some eighty people. It had eight or so double rooms (no singles), the rest being bunk-bed dormitories, four to a room. It was affiliated with the international youth hostel federation: it was intended as a

resting-place for travellers, rather than a cheap hotel. In practice, this meant young Europeans travelling around the world. Occasionally there would be parties of Vanuatans, in Nouméa for an educational visit or training programme. Sometimes there would be Polynesians, from Tahiti, or Wallis and Futuna. They rarely stayed for very long. A few people living in the Territory outside Nouméa qualified, if they were involved in some kind of educational activity. These out of town visitors were not encouraged unless Elisabeth and Francis knew them well. The hostel, they said, was for travellers and they would lose their licence if it were used as a cheap hotel, taking custom away from established (and far more expensive) hoteliers. In addition, they feared that if they admitted large numbers of Kanaks, vandalism, graffiti, and a reputation for rowdy behaviour, would result.

The hostel, when I knew it, was largely the creation of Francis. Some five years after it was first built, Francis, on his solitary travels, had come to Nouméa. He had taken a temporary part-time job managing the hostel, where he had been staying. His girlfriend Elisabeth, of Hungarian extraction but born in Argentina, had arrived at the hostel a year or so, met Francis, and remained there ever since. Francis was in his early forties, Elisabeth some ten years younger. Francis, who was born in France but had dual Swiss/French nationality, had a daughter who lived with her mother in Switzerland. He was divorced and wanted no more children. Other considerations apart, any children would have interfered with the running of the hostel and Francis' and Elisabeth's

plans for eventual long-term travel.

Francis and Elisabeth both worked extremely hard physically, occasionally employing someone from the hostel to help out casually with whatever building Francis might be reconstructing at that particular moment. Otherwise they were almost entirely on their own apart from Roselène, the girl from Maré who came in every day to help clean out the corridors, rooms, bathrooms and the kitchen. She was paid the minimum wage for domestic workers and received the minimal amount of time off. The day when Roselène recounted this to me, she added rather timidly "Ce n'est pas beaucoup". Elisabeth was always friendly and pleasant to her but Roselène, who had worked for them for three years, received no sick pay and had not yet received an increase.

Elisabeth and Francis were very reluctant to employ any other staff, partly because they wanted to run their own show and feared entanglement in a bureaucratic nightmare of rules and regulations, partly because of all the daily problems of cost and reliability. Nevertheless, they both longed to travel for a year or more, but could find nobody to whom they could entrust the hostel. Elisabeth, who stayed at the hostel so as to be with Francis, was more resentful than he was of the constant hard work and the postponement of their travel plans. She was constantly cleaning-up after people who seemed to live more leisurely lives and who were critical of the hostel and dismissive of her efforts. Francis was interested above all in his building and artistic projects: "plus cool", as people

would say of him, because his capacities and energies were largely absorbed by the hostel, his sculptures and ceramics (which I heard little about and never saw). Unlike Elisabeth, he was relatively dissociated from the people around him.

Francis sometimes talked about his early years at the hostel. He had liked it because in those days, the travellers were different: more interesting, honest, and interacted socially with him although he was in charge. The post became permanent, full-time: he began to improve the facilities. Francis told me on several occasions that he had stuck with the hostel because it suited him, he could have the pleasure of interesting company, meeting lots of people without committing himself to any particular clique or wasting money in the bars in town.

Times had changed. Despite a cumulative tariff to discourage long-stayers (permanent residents), Elisabeth and Francis were effectively obliged to accept them. The hostel had to meet its expenses and recoup the costs of the building work. Elisabeth and Francis made the best of the situation but resented it. They often lamented that things weren't what they used to be, for fewer and fewer travellers passed through Nouméa while ten years ago there had been plenty (this was because UTA and some other airlines had re-routed their round the-world-tickets). Those who were travelling round the world were no longer the same. Elisabeth and Francis no longer socialized with the hostellers, neither with the transients nor the residents. People today were spoilt,

thieving, generally dishonest, layabouts, exploitative and ungrateful; this was human nature: Elisabeth's and Francis's efforts were unappreciated and (implied in all this), their ten years of hard work improving the hostel were wasted. It was turning into a young workers' hostel, "foyer des jeunes travailleurs", full of young Europeans looking for work, and when independence came would disintegrate, would be taken over by the Kanaks for housing families, one family to a room. (The town-hall, the "mairie" of Nouméa had already made several attempts to persuade them to do this). At this stage Elisabeth and Francis would leave, to go and live in another country, perhaps Australia or even New Zealand.

Elisabeth and Francis's social isolation was caused not just by their constant presence at the hostel, and continual hard work, but by Elisabeth's manner. While Francis appeared calm, Elisabeth was less so. Essentially she was someone whose feelings had been hurt. She was not helped by the occasional half-joking remarks that would filter back to her, especially references to the SS and running the hostel like a stalag. Sometimes these resentments would come to the boil and she would tell those who annoyed her to leave the hostel. The result of this was that, along with her friends in Nouméa, there were several ex-hostellers who were harshly critical of her.

10

THE HOSTELLERS

My first six months in the hostel were fine, despite my intense anxiety, and hopes to return to Maré. There was the stimulus of new people plus the relief of being in an environment where I could easily understand and be understood, not merely on linguistic but also on cultural grounds. Behavioural norms were more familiar to me. I felt safe.

I began to map out a plan of campaign. I was learning to drive, my hair had stopped falling out, my health was beginning to improve: life was on the up-and-up. In a month or so, I anticipated, when I had my driving licence, and all the fuss had died down, I would return to Maré. Time would have taken care of any misunderstandings: Rekab would be repentant and the Cultural Committee would have come to its senses. Any little difficulties could be smoothed away. I would resume my fieldwork, full of fresh insights into how people fought and made up. All I had to do was wait.

The Visitors and the Residents

But gradually I came to realise that living in the hostel was like living in a public thoroughfare - the longer I stayed there the more I felt uncomfortably exposed. I began to realise why the old hands never spoke to the newcomers and sat in an exclusive circle around the kitchen table. It was impossible to relate to, or even recognise, all the people passing through. An average of three thousand people came to the hostel each year.

Most of these people were in their late twenties to early thirties, young, single, heterosexual, and childless. The majority travelled alone but perhaps a quarter to a third were accompanied by a boyfriend or girlfriend. Occasionally there were small single-sex groups or couples who travelled together. On a few occasions a couple with (one or more) children would arrive, or a single mother with a female (never a male) child. They never stayed long. Very rarely, an older man or woman, ages ranging from mid-fifties to mid-seventies, would come to stay for a short time. Essentially the hostel was a temporary stopping-place for young, single, people: not comfortable or convenient enough for anyone with a family or anyone who required more than basic accommodation.

After a few months, certain regular visitors became familiar to me, as they were to others. Unlike a hotel, and unlike most youth hostels elsewhere, the hostel hosted two distinct groups of people, the travellers and the workers; although, in practice, differences between them were often blurred. For social purposes, what mattered was whether people were residents or visitors, and also whether they were old-timers or newcomers. After an initial six weeks or so, visitors would begin to be treated as residents. The old-timers were regular visitors, who included travellers on their second or third time around the world, stopping off at the hostel whenever they arrived in New Caledonia. Others were working elsewhere in the Pacific, or in New Caledonia (often nurses, teachers or construction workers), who would stay at

the hostel whenever they came to town. These took up the privileged position of temporary residents, and were warmly welcomed at the long kitchen table, being invited by the permanent residents to meals, gossip, wine and coffee. The new arrivals, by contrast, were usually cold-shouldered, for nobody had energy and interest to spare on people who might be gone within a week.

This awoke the dismayed suspicion of many of the newcomers, who were eager to make contact, and blew in with gales of questions and incessant chatter. They sought for kindred souls from whom to gather information and with whom to share their experiences and undertake fresh activities. They could not see why the 'regulars' should not want to talk to them, and were often convinced that the old hands spent their time in gossip, 'les ragots', discussing the new arrivals. In fact, discussion of anyone, especially newcomers, was extremely rare, unless they evinced some kind of bizarre behaviour that impinged on others. Most of the 'regulars', frankly, couldn't give a damn.

Signs of Identity

Nearly all the people who spent any length of time at the hostel were French, or Francophone, participating in a common youth culture which spanned the ages of eighteen to forty and could almost be described as a prolonged, pseudo-adolescence. They were, at least temporarily, free of the various constraints and status symbols that usually mark the transition from adolescence to adulthood in Western society.

These included full-time employment and financial commitments, such as payments towards a house, and responsibility for a partner and children. The hostellers did not use their dress, appearance, and activities to symbolise generational differences between eighteen and forty, even though those aged forty could have been parents of the youngest ones. Instead they looked young, wore similar clothes - for instance, T-shirts, jeans, and trainers - and had similar social and recreational activities (such as listening to rock music). This age-blending of recreational clothes, tastes, and activities was not unique to New Caledonia, being common throughout the West. Yet this emphasis on youthful tastes and appearances pointed to wider phenomena of economic uncertainty, unemployment and day-to-day living. [These will be discussed in more detail, below.]

The hostellers' appearances and, or, activities were marked by certain shared symbols of identity. Whether people were staying or just passing through, whether they had come to New Caledonia to work or to travel, their recreational clothes, their recreational activities, were broadly the same. They formed a temporary "super ethny" (Pierre van den Berghe, The Quest for the Other (1994:8)), whose conversation was designed to establish similar reference points between themselves and other people.

Their clothes were casual and sporty, with the women occasionally sporting discreet glimpses of gold jewellery and, or, (mostly semi-) precious stones (which they usually

claimed that they could sell if necessary. Some people seemed to travel the world with knick-knacks that they picked up in one destination and tried to sell in the next. Ethnic jewellery, shirts, T-shirts, sarongs: these arrived at the hostel in what were effectively Thai or Indonesian pedlars' packs, with owners who would immediately try to offload as much as possible, often describing the heart-rending poverty of the peasants from whom they had purchased it. [My response was that I would willingly pay the peasants but saw no reason to pay the seller.]

Others, arriving from Asia, had bought gold and precious stones, convinced that they could resell and make a profit. Sometimes they were taken for a ride. One young man, Bernard, spent two thousand US dollars on buying gold in Thailand. The shop-keeper pointed out that he might have problems trying to take it through Customs and suggested that he should send it to him, Poste Restante, at the General Post Office in Sydney. [The gold never arrived. Other misfortunes followed: Eventually Bernard hung himself.] Short skirts, sarongs (pareos), jeans, cycling, Bermuda and other shorts were much in evidence (it was generally too hot for leggings). These were topped by Australian, ethnic and other T-shirts and or sweatshirts, frequently proclaiming either a spirit of adventure or the brotherhood of man (very occasionally some Anglophone turned up in a "Greenpeace" one and got funny looks in town or at the marina). Batik and other Indonesian textiles flourished, although brand-names such as Levi's and Benetton were also visible. Flip-flops ("claquettes") and

sandals generally replaced boots, although these too were popular, as were Reeboks and other trainers. Jackets were often polarfleece, ersatz Helly-Hansen, accompanied by featherweight cagoules in strident colours. Ethnic jewellery, Ray-bans, and Swiss Army knives completed the well-dressed wanderer. Not all travellers were rich enough for the necessary brand-names nor even for all the equipment. But nearly everybody had at least some of it. Most had cameras, some had world maps, many had guide-books (Rough Guides... and Lonely Planet publications for the Anglophones, Les Guides du Routard for the Francophones) while some kept journals, that they carried around with them. This latter group was rather ostentatiously imbued with the spirit of adventure, and hinted at fairly liberal, comfortable backgrounds.

The social life of the hostel was based around the kitchen-table and in the big refectory/common-room, or in, or on, the small garden later concreted into patio. People also gathered on the balconies running along the back of the new block of dormitories, looking over the marina, the town, the hills and the sea. Games were perpetually played: chess, scrabble, backgammon (from the tattered boards left on a corner table) sometimes dominoes, and, always, tarot [1] and other card games. Sometimes people played the guitar, usually Francis Cabrel, Serge Gainsbourg or Jacques Brel. They sang of sailors in the port of Amsterdam or launched into fractured versions of "Hotel California". With each other they discussed travel, money, bargains, scams, and work. The men, in

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1 Tarot was played as the European card game tarok, and only sometimes used , as far as I could tell, for fortune-telling.

particular, talked boats, sometimes diving, and, somewhat self-consciously, shark-fishing. Sharks, their size, ferocity, and feeding-habits, impressed even the most hardened audience, while self and dead shark photographs, suitably admired, accumulated prestige before being posted home.

Nearly all the visitors paid homage to the recurring cultural images of their generation(s), although these shifted slightly, according to age, and the moods and tastes of particular people. Jefferson Airplane was the musical preserve of the older ones (hitting forty); the Eagles, and "Hotel California" those of the younger (late twenties), who made up the largest group. Brel, Cabrel, and Gainsbourg, Jim Morrison and the Doors: (Oliver Stone's film "The Doors" reached Nouméa in the autumn of 1991): the films of Oliver Stone, Peter Greenaway (especially "The Draughtsman's Contract"), Luc Besson's "Le Grand Bleu" [2] : the poems of Jim Morrison, Tolkien's Lord of the Rings: all these cropped up regularly and led to acerbic arguments as to their greatness.

Jefferson Starship was denigrated, Morrison and Tolkien lauded as great poets, great writers (greater even than Shakespeare). Besson's "Atlantis", which reached the Hickson City cinema in May 1992, was nothing compared to "Le Grand Bleu". [I was apparently the only one who liked it.] "Atlantis" was just underwater photography. It had no plot. Neither the manta's graceful progress through the midnight blue lagoon of

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2 Both "The Draughtsman's Contract" ("Meurtre dans un jardin anglais") and "Le Grand Bleu" were shown on local television while I was living at the hostel, but the films were already so well-known that their iconic function was not affected. Oliver Stone's "JFK" was shown in Nouméa in August 1992.

Ouvéa, nor the tight, striped, syncopated wriggle of the sea-snakes, were as good as narratives, humans. [Any disagreements with these judgments usually attracted looks of hurt surprise, as if casting aspersions on the other person, or indicating a lack of solidarity].

Everyone went to the cinema, for films were Nouméa's cheapest form of public entertainment. The three principal cinemas, the Rex, the Plaza, and the Hickson City, were much frequented. Certain films were universally popular: "The Silence of the Lambs", "Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves", and "The Last of the Mohicans".

Ideal Types

Despite this shared culture, there were some crucial differences between workers and travellers, even though the two categories overlap. Although the following discussions contain some suppositions, generalizations, and stereotypes, all the case histories and illustrations refer to real people. As stated earlier, only the names, and, sometimes, the nationalities, have been changed so as to disguise the informants. But first, briefly, I shall examine the concept of ideal types.

My categorization of the hostellers follows Weber's arguments for "ideal types" (1949: 90-112).

Weber asserts that the historical interpretation of knowledge is an artistic one. He argues for the necessity of

"pure" concepts in the social sciences (taking examples from economics and history), pointing out that true empiricism is an impossibility, given that some conceptual framework is present in any description. If these concepts are not evident to, or not deliberately made so, by the historian, they will be unconscious, created by feeling, and sense impressions, and so contaminate his data rather than clarifying it.

The "ideal type", Weber argues, can consist of the deliberate, non-pejorative, exaggeration of certain characteristics, a recognizable synthesis of part of the enormous mass of ideas, attitudes, behaviour etcetera, expressed by the flux of individuals under study. This synthesis has never actually existed, and, being partial, is not an average. It exists only to aid the formulation of hypotheses, to carry out comparisons over time and space, and, by its own limitations, to show the limitations of particular arguments.

People, claims Weber, should be understood as separate from the ideas expressed in the ideal type. Associated and derivative ideas may continue to influence people long after their original source is no longer current. People should be understood primarily in psychological terms, but this does not mean that the ideas within them cannot be, as it were, extracted sociologically and used to build the ideal type.

However, as Campbell says (The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism 1987: 220), cultural ideals,

ethics and personality types do not necessarily coincide even though there may be strains towards consistency. The complexity of social action is such that behaviour governed by contrasting ethical, social and psychological factors and values can be incorporated into one overall style of living (which may vary according to age, gender or other factors). For this reason, real people, such as the hostellers, often fit into several broad sociological categories, which are necessarily indiscrete. Although references to Bourdieu, Zeldin, Le Wita and others are used to help clarify the hostellers' perceived tastes, activities and social status, these are used only to establish general differences, and not to create an elaborate social typology. In describing the hostellers, in categorizing the workers, travellers and others, I have produced "typical", if sometimes exaggerated, syntheses of people, their ideas, and the issues affecting daily life. But, to rephrase Weber, ultimately these are only reifications: there is no such thing as a truly typical, concrete, person or group, because each individual is unique, despite his or her common experiences. Even so, anyone who was in Nouméa, in the early 1990s, should recognize the types.

The Workers and the Travellers

The differences between workers and travellers seemed to reveal themselves more through attitudes than through anything else. There was an intermediate group, which could be described as travellers with projects: those were the ones who were taking a year off with a round-the-world ticket, with some definite plans for their return; or those who came simply

as tourists for three months or so, or to scout out any possible job opportunities. These people had more or less the same approaches to life as the workers, although some workers were less interested in travel, more interested in money, than others. The real difference seemed to be that many of the long-term travellers gave the impression of still being in the process of constructing their self and social identities, by their constant discussion of where they'd been, what they'd seen, and, above all, what it had cost.

It was this that struck me about the travellers - it was other travellers whom they wanted to impress, as if by recounting their travels they could say that they were alike, they too had turned themselves into the sort of people whom they wanted to be. It was as if, because of their transience, they wanted an audience, needed to feel part of a group, to confirm and assert their own self-identity.

The workers appeared less discursive, more fixed. The travellers' sense of self-identity came from being mirrored in the regards of other travellers. The workers' self-identity came from their work (especially if they had job satisfaction and or professional qualifications), and the money which they were paid for it (so that others, not just those with whom they socialized or hoped to resemble, saw them as doing something worthwhile and worthy of recognition). Workers, one might say, were integrated into the wider society in a way that travellers were not. Their jobs, while limiting their activities, also gave them greater consumer access, choice and

control. These satisfactions were steady on-going ones, while the travellers' satisfactions were those of freedom, marginalization, of disposable time and the money to enjoy it .

The travellers could be loosely divided into the short-term and the long-term. Of the long-term, all of them male, some had travelled for up to ten years, spending six months here, a year there, always with the intention of moving on: and explained their actions by saying that they were unable to settle down, that they had permanently itchy feet. Like Barbara G. Myerhoff's young American part-time hippies (see "Organization and Ecstasy" 1975: 53-54), these travellers found that it was the experience of travel that made the working stop-overs bearable and allowed them to believe in the possibility of a better, unstructured, life "out there".

Most of the travellers were French, recalling Rob Shields's reference to "the idea that the frontier holds a redemptive disorder for highly ordered societies", in Places on the Margin (1991:191), although the frontier he writes of is the Canadian North rather than the French Pacific. Some of these long-term travellers gave the impression of deliberation, others of rootless drifting. Some had lost touch or only communicated intermittently with their families. Most short-term travellers were simply "roughing it", tourists by another name. They kept in contact with their families, had good relationships with them, and saw their travelling more as an extended adventurous holiday than anything else.

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THE WORKERS

The workers, as opposed to the travellers, divided into four distinct groups: educational (teachers and social workers); medical (doctors, dentists, pharmacists, and nurses);information technology and office workers; construction workers and manual labourers. New Caledonia's skill shortages meant that the medical, educational, and information technology workers were in high demand. In particular, in 1991, when I arrived, there was a very high turnover of nurses and teachers, and jobs as supply teachers and nurses were fairly easy to come by, for both men and women, although most of the nurses were women. [French nurses kept telling me that as a group they were everywhere, real vagabonds, travelling all over the world: "des vraies vaudrilleuses".] By the time I left New Caledonia, in mid-1993, the market for nurses, and for baccalauréat-only primary school teachers, had begun to dry up, owing to the emergence of suitably qualified Caledonians.

Teachers, Nurses, and Social Workers

For the educational and medical personnel, life in the Pacific had some distinct advantages, especially if combined with the hardship payments attached to posts in the bush. The teachers, male and female, would lament the country's low standards of education (coconut(-palm) baccalauréat, "bac des cocotiers", was the expression), their pupils' stupidity, or inability to grasp the principles of French culture

underlying the school curriculum; while simultaneously praising the children's silence and good manners. Those teaching adolescents in the colleges, or in the lycées of Nouméa and elsewhere, were more ambivalent. This was less because of rowdy behaviour than of the hulking inattention of their male students, pushing twenty, longing to be elsewhere, often large, hirsute, and in the case of the Wallisians, frequently tattooed [3] . Privately, unnerved, the teachers alluded to cannibals, and transition from the Stone Age.

Xavier was an around-the-world cyclist, nearing forty, who had come from Australia and was loosely acquainted with the Sydneyites (described later). He was doing a working stopover, earning some money as a teacher before continuing his travels. It was, he confided, difficult. He had shown a video of childbirth to a biology class: his fifteen years-old Kanak pupils promptly got up to walk out. He had called them back: the video was compulsory, he said, part of the course. All the girls and nearly all the boys had promptly sat with their backs turned to the video: how could he teach them, he asked, with those attitudes? A colleague of his, in Ouvéa, had mentioned that his pupils' ancestors were cannibals: a furious delegation of parents had besieged the headmaster, who had only extricated himself by producing several history and other books referring to cannibalism and explaining that the teachers had to teach what was laid down in the curriculum.

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3 The Wallisians were not the only group to have tattoos: other Pacific Islanders often had them as well, as did, occasionally, the Kanaks. The Kanaks tended to have small discreet dots or names inked into their face, hands, arms or other parts of their bodies. But the Wallisian tattoos, often on the face or across the knuckles, tended to be larger and more immediately visible.

Other teachers whom I knew included Nicolas and Honorine, in their mid- and late twenties. Honorine had been teaching for some years in Ouvéa, and who came regularly to the hostel for city weekends, so as to avoid "une dépression nerveuse". Nicolas finally ended up teaching at Houailou, living with his Kanak girlfriend Mariette. The more I heard about Houailou and Ouvéa, notorious hotspots of political unrest, linked by legend and custom as well as by continued resistance to French rule, the more I admired those teachers and nurses who worked there. Honorine especially, who lived alone, displayed a cool head and polite, controlled, self-sufficient resilience.

Life in the bush, in the small back-country dispensaries, gave the nurses opportunities and responsibilities which they would never have had in France, where a doctor would have supervised most of their work. Diane and Julie, with whom I briefly shared a bunk-room dormitory, liked delivering babies and treating wounds, even if there were always the possibilities of air or road evacuation to the hospitals in Nouméa. In Nouméa itself, pay and conditions were regarded as poor, compared with France, but there was always the compensation of sea and sun, and the prospect of transfers or future travel.

The doctors and dentists, were, as far as I could discover (for very few of them came to the hostel, as they could afford comfortable hotel or rented accommodation), mostly young,

male and well-paid (often having remained in New Caledonia after having completed their military service: I once saw a female dentist but never encountered a female doctor). In the bush, they had the pleasures of considerable responsibility and of dealing with conditions only rarely encountered in France; ranging from a few elderly victims of leprosy or non-drug resistant tuberculosis, or people with dengue fever, yaws, or tropical diseases originating elsewhere in the Pacific, to hard-to-diagnose illnesses locally attributed to witchcraft ("le boucan"). [See Anne Tristan, L'Autre Monde, (1990:235-242) for a description of how well-meaning young French doctors unwittingly managed to antagonize the tribe of Gossanah in Ouvéa. The tribe then shocked the doctors by declaring that they would prefer to carry out auto-medication and bypass the dispensary as much as possible.] Regarding themselves as good and altruistic people, and, in the case of the doctors and dentists, of high social standing, the medical personnel seemed to be even more shocked and disturbed than the teachers when they, or their homes, or their cars, were stoned or attacked, when they came across the profound antagonisms that lay beneath the surface of New Caledonian society.

The youth and social workers, both male and female, had less openings than the teachers but vacancies appeared from time to time, usually in Nouméa. As for the office workers of both sexes, those who found jobs were the lucky ones, for while there was a limited demand for information technology, it was usually at a fairly technical level, rather

than for wordprocessing or simple spreadsheet packages. Some people found jobs as clerks and secretaries, in banks or in shipping or in administration: many did not and either returned to France or travelled on. Teaching, nursing, and administration offered the best and most easily available jobs in New Caledonia. Deeply resented by both the Caldoches and the Kanaks, the baccalauréat and diploma entry-level jobs market had been taken over by better qualified outsiders; young metropolitan gendarmes or civil servants, on their initial postings, short-term contract-holders brought over from France, the wives of soldiers based in Nouméa , would-be settlers, and travellers doing working stopovers.

For some people, such as Bernard, a youth worker, New Caledonia seemed to be almost their last chance of getting employment; of mastering their destinies and making a go of things that would enable them to live in a style that they could no longer afford or be unlikely ever to afford in France. Good-looking, charming, in his late twenties or early thirties, Bernard suffered intermittently from depression (as I later discovered) and was a strong believer in fate. He was, at least partly, of Algerian descent, which may have prevented him from getting jobs for which he was qualified. All I know, is that when he came to New Caledonia he wanted a professional job and a girlfriend, so that he could, at least temporarily, make some money and settle down. Very hard up, having lost his money in Thailand, he was forced to take low-status jobs to make ends meet. Finally he was offered a job in a children's home in Poindimié, a small town and administrative

centre halfway up the east coast.

Bernard had great hopes of Poindimié. He told me he was sure that there were nice girls there, more warm and open than in Nouméa. [Having visited Poindimié, I thought this unlikely but said nothing.]. Arriving there, alone in the rain, when the children were away, he was horrified by the neglected, impoverished air of the home. He left the next day.

This was professional suicide. Having broken his contract, no-one would engage him. He became increasingly depressed and finally hung himself, in a converted warehouse that he shared with some Sydneyites, at Ducos.

Bernard was the most tragic example of how unemployment and poor long-term prospects were driving people to the colonies in almost the same way that, thirty years ago, Algerian independence had driven the "pieds-noirs". But the days of opportunity, had they ever really existed, were over. New Caledonia was harsh to those non-specialists who relied on abilities rather than contacts to get themselves work. Women, provided they were young and pretty and well-presented, had a slight edge over men. Youthful charm and good looks were assets in all jobs, especially those dealing with the public, and were occasionally a specific requirement. Cornélie, a very stylish, attractive, youth worker, aged forty, spent a long time before she found a professional position. Meanwhile, she applied for numerous jobs, including a job as a shop assistant in a tobacconist's in the centre of town: she

was turned down as too old. The shop's main clients were conscript soldiers: any assistant had to be young and pretty enough to draw them in and then flirt with them.

Economic Factors and Distortions in the Job Market

New Caledonia was a hard place to be, and a hard place to get work, for several reasons. There was a net shortage of jobs, especially if one considered that many Kanaks were virtually excluded from the labour market by choosing, and, or, being forced to, live in agricultural near self-sufficiency. The ethnic and social tensions were exacerbated by the very high cost of living. This resulted from the import of many goods and foodstuffs from France, Australia and sometimes New Zealand or Vanuatu, to the neglect of local production and manufacture. Other economic distortions resulted partly from under-development and partly from over-reliance on the nickel market.

Residents, including shopkeepers, and employers, feared the Kanaks, and resented "Métros", known pejoratively as the "ears", "les z'oreilles" [4]. They anticipated competition and the possible introduction of tighter wage controls and legislation.

New Caledonia's small size, small population, small labour market and consequent small turnover, its cartels in mining, transportation, food and goods importation and

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4 The origins of "les z'oreilles" are unclear, but Mille et un Mots Calédoniens (FOL, 1982) states that the term is commonly used in all French overseas territories and departments.

supermarket distribution, made the relations of production, exploitation, etcetera, starkly evident. There was no room for failures, and little for non-conformists. If people had jobs they had to keep them. There was little risk-taking, few opportunities, few second chances. New Caledonia was not part of France, nor of the EEC, but a French territory [5]. This adversely affected public services, social security regulations and payments, medical costs, and employment legislation. For example, one ex-hosteller, Edgar from Marseille, got a job at a noodles factory. There was a machinery accident, and he lost the thumb and two fingers of his right hand. He was a right-handed manual labourer, aged thirty-two. Six months after the accident, he had yet to receive any form of compensation from his former employer for what was effectively the loss of his livelihood.

Those who had financial and other problems had to rely on their families for help. Psychological support services were virtually non-existent. The mental hospital, CHS Albert Bousquet, was generally admitted to be seriously under-resourced, with the treatments offered being some twenty years behind the times. [As I left, great publicity was being given to its projected improvement.] There was said to be a high incidence of untreated alcoholism and depression among

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5 New Caledonia is a TOM, "Territoire d'Outre Mer", rather than a DOM, "Département d'Outre Mer". DOMs, like Tahiti or Guadeloupe, are supposed to be organized and governed in the same way as departments of metropolitan France. TOMs are regarded as integral parts of France, but are organized and governed with some local autonomy.

The Treaty of Rome (1957) gave France the right to decide when, and how, New Caledonia would be incorporated into the Common Market. While I was there, New Caledonia remained outside it.

the Métros who had come to work, or find work, in New Caledonia.

The hostel offered safety and companionship as people stuck together while assessing their prospects in this new country. Bochner and Furnham (1986: 124,128,129), in their discussion of long and short term sojourners, including migrants, tourists, foreign students, and Peace Corps workers, point out that foreign students often experience very little friendship within the host culture. Similar points are made by Michael Argyle in The Psychology of Interpersonal Behaviour (1972:149). Sojourners' social support networks generally consist of their own nationals or fellow-foreigners, sometimes mixed in with a few host national friends. This certainly applied to me and, I think, to most of the hostellers. Bochner and Furnham (1986:149, 239) emphasize the importance of the old hand in the foreigner's network of social support They also point out that tourists, as observers, experience relatively little culture shock until they start to participate as job-hunters, etcetera. Then the problems begin. This social support was one of the main reasons why people stayed at the hostel.

Those who were unsuccessful in finding work or other means to happiness either travelled on, or began to disintegrate in despair. Bernard was not the only hosteller to have killed himself. An AIDS sufferer had shot himself in one of the shower-rooms, a year or so before I arrived. He had decided to live the rest of his life on an idyllic South Seas

island, and been bitterly disillusioned.

As Elisabeth, said to me, there was nothing anyone could do, for anyone. She was referring to Elfride, an ex-hosteller, a young woman who was in and out of the local mental hospital, having attempted suicide after various work, financial, and love, affairs had gone disastrously wrong. If people were alone, and ran into difficulties, they ought to go home. The only help they would get was from people who loved them.

Little sympathy was shown for Bernard, or others who showed signs of cracking up, by the majority of hostellers. This was not callousness so much as self-protection. If one person gave in, they all might. The general verdict was that it was cowardice, lack of moral strength, that made Bernard kill himself: after all, people said, they too had been in terrible situations, alone and unemployed: and did they kill themselves? No. They found the strength to carry on. Few had any time for my protestations that Bernard was depressed. He shouldn't have let himself get that way in the first place, they replied.

In a sense, they were right. New Caledonia was no place for those with illusions, or those who did not know how to look after themselves and recognize their constitutional limits. Retrospective pity and sentiment would get you nowhere.

Those people whose primary interest in New Caledonia was to make money (as opposed to earning money from a respectable, professional life-style) were perhaps more opportunistic, and psychologically resilient, than those who hoped that in New Caledonia they would at last be offered the jobs for which they were qualified. Often, those who wanted to make money had done a sort of colonial tour, working their way around the French colonies or ex-colonies, looking for business opportunities in Tahiti, Guiane, Guadeloupe [6] , La Réunion, Madagascar, Mayotte, and sometimes, Quebec. Very rarely, there were people who had been in Algeria, Tunisia, or Morocco.

These people ranged from Lionel the pharmacist, who had qualified late, and, at thirty-nine, was hoping, finally, to buy his own business, to Blaise, the estate agent, to Raymond, a squinting, barely literate, twenty-something who was an accomplished entrepreneur. Raymond was obsessed with making money, his eye fixed permanently upon the main chance as he figured out whether there were any means to get more Kanaks to work for him for even less pay. He was a foreman-cum-private contractor on various construction works throughout Nouméa and elsewhere. Raymond spoke entirely in what he considered an amusing stream of French and English obscenities, having learnt his English on building sites and docks throughout Canada. Raymond was an important figure for

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6 Although Guadeloupe is legally part of France - a DOM - I have heard Guadeloupians protest that living conditions and social security benefits are not the same as in mainland France and that it is, effectively, a colony. There was a small Guadeloupian independence movement, which professed sympathy with the Kanaks.

the hostellers, for he would recruit friends of his to work for him. They rarely remained friends for long. Obscure stories of double dealing abounded. But he was useful to those men who needed to get money quickly and had the stamina and practical skills required. These included Arthur, Fritz, and several other of the travellers mentioned below.

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THE TRAVELLERS

Many of the travellers on working stopovers were teachers and nurses. They differed from the workers only in that they planned to return to France once their extended holidays were over. They had no intention of abandoning a career in France for one in the colonies. They felt optimistic about their future employment prospects and their return home.

Arthur and the Sydneyites

But New Caledonia was the end of the road for certain people. Those French nationals who arrived in New Caledonia, from Australia or New Zealand, and had not come primarily for work or for a holiday, were usually but not exclusively male and in trouble. There was a loose network of French ex- Sydney dwellers who came to New Caledonia for various reasons. Most had outstayed their welcome, running into trouble with the Australian immigration authorities either because of, or despite, work, marriages, or marriages for residence visas, "mariages blancs". The Sydneyites, so called because they all appeared to have been living in the disreputable areas of Redfern or Kings' Cross in Sydney, and were vaguely acquainted with one another, or with each other's friends. All of them had stayed at some time or other at a backpackers' hostel called the Pink House. The Pink House was not its real name: it was known as such because it was painted pink.

The first of the Sydneyites was Arthur, who arrived in Nouméa in the spring of 1992, and was in many ways the core of the group. He was the hostel's most extreme example of what I was later to think of as a traveller type, for although no one person could be said to typify the traveller, most travellers seemed to cluster certain common characteristics, as stated earlier. Arthur controlled his behaviour just enough to be allowed to stay in the hostel, although his first six months or so were spent outside it. He had passed a few days there after his arrival from Australia.

Arthur was in his early thirties. I eventually found out that he was an ex-heroin addict. Arthur had managed to drag himself away from one poison to become fixated on another, alcohol. If slower, its effects were no less deadly, and gradually, over the time I knew him, he deteriorated. Shortly after I left, I heard that he been thrown out of the hostel and was disintegrating as a down-and-out occasionally spotted in the bars of Nouméa.

When I first met Arthur he had come over to follow Denise, a small bespectacled schoolmistress, who had cycled around the world. She was now teaching in New Caledonia. and sometimes came to stay at the hostel. The exact nature of their relationship, and of their friends', were never very clear to me. ["Toi tu t'occupes de ton cul!" as Arthur so elegantly put it.] The outline was plain enough. In Sydney, Denise had met Arthur, and the pair of them had lived with a bunch of Anglo-French sharps, "arnaquers", all of whom casually and

druggily tried milking the social security system for all it was worth. Arthur, so he let the hostellers know, was from a good family, very bourgeois, in France, and if, on one level, he was, like the others, playing survival games in a foreign country whose mores and attitudes they felt under no compulsion to take seriously, on another he desperately wanted to be a success.

Arthur had become an Australian citizen and for this, keeping one jump ahead of the authorities, he had come to New Caledonia when vague story of debt and bankruptcy in the antiques business had seemed likely to land him in an Australian jail. But in New Caledonia he had no prospects.

Arthur had no baccalauréat, he had refused to take it and gone to art school at the earliest opportunity: teaching and administrative jobs were barred to him. He once said to me desperately that, all those years ago, he had never thought that one day he might need it. His history of political and artistic activism - he spoke obscurely and grandly of involvement with the Aboriginal embassy [7] - his claimed contacts with Sydney lawyers, with the director of a famous Australian art gallery; his knowledge of furniture, his Australian-gained certificate in cabinet-making and furniture restoration; all these were of no use to him in New Caledonia. There any market in furniture

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7 He may possibly have been referring to the painting "Aboriginal embassy" (1986, Robert Campbell junior), as the events which it depicted would have taken place when Arthur was still at school in France. ["A tent embassy had been set up outside the federal parliament building in Canberra in 1972 to highlight the dispossession of the Aboriginal people and the denial of sovereign rights to their land." Wally Caruana, Aboriginal Art 1993: 198.]

restoration was minimal and probably already cornered by some long-established trader. Arthur had to get by on odd jobs, on manual labour or magazine distribution. But Arthur had "culture". He would discuss art, music, books and poetry, and, even if his judgments were at times debatable, his performance was impressive; certainly enough for Denise who from time to time referred to her "ouvrier" proletarian background in a manner which was not exactly ashamed but not particularly easy either.

Arthur, like the other Sydneyites, like certain other travellers, had been trying, I believe, to construct his identity through certain sorts of experience: an excessive, bingeing, cram it all in, Rimbaudian attitude [8] which sometimes burnt out to a disillusioned amoral cynicism. But, as he had come to realise, the costs of this approach could be very high. Those members of the bourgeoisie who adopt a Bohemian life-style risk losing everything if unsuccessful. Bohemianism is an accepted youthful variant of bourgeois life-cycles, but those who fail at it financially are expected to return to a more conventional way of living (eg Campbell 1987: 223-7). Once they permanently lose their economic status, they lose their social status as well. For Arthur, social class was a meaningful moral category (Downes and Rock, Understanding Deviance, 1988: 206), as it was for some other allegedly left-

8 Several of the travellers professed a fondness for Rimbaud, particularly "Le Bateau ivre" (1871). Ironically, the end of "Le Bateau ivre", with its melancholy child, shows the boat's fantastic voyage crumbling beneath an adult reality. These people may have admired, but were not, Rimbaud. He, becoming disillusioned with the transmutations of poetry and experience, ended his life in exile and squalor as an arms dealer.

wing political radicals of bourgeois origin whom I met in New Caledonia (see comments in Downes and Rock (1988: 145,173-4, 219-222), claiming that deviants share the same values as other people, it's just that the intensity of their commitment varies, along with their mastery of excuses, "techniques of neutralization"). Arthur had no desire, despite his social slumming, to be mistaken for what he was effectively becoming, a down-and-out.

The apparent costs of Arthur's (and others') attitudes included unemployment, drink and, or, drug addiction.

Deviant Behaviour within the Hostel

In the case of the drink and drug users, Francis and Elisabeth tolerated a moderate amount of public drinking inside the hostel, although alcoholics such as Arthur often drank secretly inside their dormitories, as well as with friends outside the hostel or at the bars in town. Anyone caught using cannabis was immediately expelled from the hostel, although occasional use of it went on. It seemed to me that the years of addiction had left people such as Arthur oblivious to anything except their next fix, so that even after they stopped, or replaced their particular addiction for another, their ability to relate to others had been damaged.

Lack of money produced an increasing desperation that sometimes led to them taking up work, or going home, but sometimes ended in a ruthless systematic scrounging and exploitation of anyone who felt sorry for them.

hand market in Nouméa although there was a twice-monthly car boot sale held at Pont-des-Français on the outskirts of town. "The English Bookshop" as I eventually discovered, was where people would go to sell books and magazines taken from the communal pile next to the refectory game boards. Eventually, Elisabeth and Francis stopped this by setting up a book exchange system in their office.

Stealing went in cycles, suggesting that the culprits tended to be transients rather than residents. Elisabeth would watch those whom she considered guilty, regularly getting up at about two in the morning to see if anyone were in the kitchen. Sometimes she would go through people's belongings. At times, she appeared to be obsessed with it. On one occasion she accused a visiting nun from Vanuatu with stealing a padlock, and her lay male colleague with stealing a blanket, yelling at them as they departed. Elisabeth may have been correct, but her approach was unproductive. Later she told me how she hated all religious people, as she was sure that they were hypocrites.

The most persistent and cunning thieves, although present at different times, were Thérèse, a young female journalist, and Gaston, a deaf and dumb man of about thirty. She was an (allegedly) bisexual ex-heroin addict, who frequently walked around with fresh bite marks on her throat, and tried to steal my field notes and photographs. Gaston relieved me of 4,000cpf (almost thirty pounds). Both were incessant liars who took advantage of people's good nature.

P.T.O.

This amorality was something which characterised a lot of travellers, whether they had money or not: nearly all of the transients had considerable, carefully cultivated, charm, which I began to recognise as a sign of wanting something: an invitation to share a meal, extra bits of food, the loan of money or equipment which would never be returned without asking, (if at all), and, if returned, might well be broken. I think that these people's feelings towards others, their original moral controls and sense of social obligation (you don't usually steal things from people you stay with) had either been weakly internalized [9] or been blunted by the short duration of their relationships. Those always on the move could escape, or were excluded from, normal social exchanges and obligations (Homans and Blau in Downes and Rock (1988: 220-1) give lack of social commitment as a possible explanation for delinquency). They claimed to find some romantic charm in squalor or degradation (implicitly arguing it to be the really real). Even the most apparently pleasant would take advantage of others, whether inside or outside the hostel, often by outright stealing.

People would steal money, clothes, food, anything that they could get away with. Sometimes they would go into town and try to sell things second-hand. There was no real second-

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9 Bourdieu (in Distinction 1984: 352) claims that certain sub-sectors of the petite bourgeoisie subordinate morality to pragmatism and social mobility. However, I would hesitate to make any determinate link between individuals' class origins and their personal honesty.

P.T.O.

Elisabeth eventually caught them. After they left the hostel, stories of their activities gradually filtered back. When I left, both were said to be wanted by the police.

Other means of self-support included shop-lifting, fetching and then over-charging for drinks in bars, failing to repay loans, or buying items at a fraction of their worth from vulnerable and desperate people (eg buying jewels off Western heroin addicts in India). These people displayed little shame in recounting their exploits (possibly their group bravado enabled them to push away any individual unease: cf. Downes and Rock 1988: 36-7). Arnaud (discussed below), once said to me that the hostel resembled the "cours des miracles" of medieval Paris: did I know about them? [I did. [10]] When he left the hostel, he was going to write a book about it. [I privately thought that I would get there first.]

The travellers were often good "raconteurs", temporarily disguising that they were all take and no give. To be fair, I think that some of the travellers found themselves in very

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10 See Paul LaCroix in Goffman (1959) 1982: 126-127:
"In the seventeenth century, therefore, in order to become a thorough Argotier, it was necessary not only to solicit alms like any mere beggar, but also to possess the dexterity of the cut-purse and the thief. These arts were to be learned in the places which served as the habitual rendezvous of the very dregs of society, and which were generally known as the "Cours des Miracles" . These houses, or rather resorts, had been so called, if we are to believe a writer of the early part of the seventeenth century, 'because rogues...and others, who have allday been cripples, maimed, dropsical and beset with every sort of bodily ailment, come home at night...and, on entering the court, they throw aside their crutches, resume their healthy and lusty appearance...Can there be a greater miracle than is to be seen in this court, where the maimed walk upright?' " (LaCroix 1876:471)

difficult situations, and simply did not have enough money. It could be argued that their behaviour was a near-adolescent form of intermittent delinquency which would stop when they stopped travelling and emerged from a state of drift into a more structured life-style (Matza in Downes and Rock 1988: 144-6). On the other hand, they might have been incorrigible delinquents, people who were always rule-breaking but whose behaviour was more or less discreet according to circumstances. Whether they were or not was impossible to tell, although I suspect that for some of them, from remarks they made, petty thieving was nothing new.

Those short of money could have cut their trips short and gone home (as some presumably did), rather than covertly batten onto other people. Some might have seen returning home as a sign of failure, while others might not have had a home to go to, or, like Arthur, might not have had the airfare and been unwilling to ask their friends or families for help.

If pressed, the culprits usually declared their freedom from the petty constraints that bound other people (Arthur was very good at this). Once, after the deaf and dumb Gaston stole some money from a bag I had left in the refectory, Fritz, an Austrian Sydneyite and resident hosteller, remarked that he had very little time for most travellers, who were "always pretending to be so tolerant and open-minded", and were always "ripping people off".

This applied to sexual as well as other behaviour. A sort of easy-going, good-humoured promiscuity, a cheerful opportunism coupled with a refusal to get involved, characterised many of the travellers, especially the Sydneyites. I began to understand why the words 'aventurier', 'adventurer', have such negative connotations in French and English. They were no respecters of social and moral boundaries.

I am exaggerating, of course. Arthur was the barely acceptable version of a certain sort of traveller who passed through the hostel but rarely stayed. Such travellers left either because they couldn't afford it, or because Elisabeth or Francis threw them out, having caught them stealing, drug-taking or otherwise disrupting the life and reputation of the hostel.

But others, mostly male, were far more canny in their ability to manage their lives without over-disrupting those of others. They did this without stealing or cheating, simply forgetting to repay loans, always inviting themselves to meals, absenting themselves from any unpleasant task or occasion, charming their numerous sexual partners into believing that any break-up was all for the best, and generally displaying a "coolness" that could be interpreted as a deliberate proclamation of their transitory status, and, so, perhaps, a form of "self"-preservation.

Most of these temporary drop-outs admitted that the

timing of their travels was as much influenced by the high youth unemployment in France as by a wish for adventure. Yet, whether they admitted it or not, I believe that they all realised that this state of affairs could not go on for ever. At some stage they would have to settle down and seek permanent employment. Some of them, usually those who did not stay at the hostel very long, had attitudes which reminded me of a magazine article which I had read in Nouméa. It described French visitors to Guadeloupe, twenty-somethings, drifting boys and girls (sic): dope-smoking, sleeping in the park, living in the open. The boys, hung with Walkmans, listening to Gainsbourg, playing his songs on their guitars; the girls offering themselves to tourists, at the doors of hotels.

The inhabitants of the hostel also reminded me of other things I had read, heard and seen. There were young women who travelled and constantly looked for a boyfriend, even if only for a short time (I hadn't noticed that young male travellers constantly looked for girlfriends except as one-night stands, although I may be wrong: it seemed to me that young men usually refused responsibility but young women often wanted protectors). I had read stories of young women going to work or study in Paris. In Paris, the absolute necessity for many young women of finding boyfriends, protectors, into whose flats they could move, however temporarily, was because their finances outlawed any other solution. Also, in Paris, social and professional life demanded that both men and women should be seen as part of a couple. I

never heard of this happening professionally in England but there were certainly several fake couples, "faux couples", sharing flats in Nouméa. It was explained to me that employers looked upon this as a reassuring sign of normality.

Frank, who had worked for IBM and whom I met at the hostel in the summer of 1992, told me that most of the people at the hostel were drifters who would never be able to hold down a regular, time-keeping, proper job. I disagreed, partly because I was better acquainted with them than he was, and had noted their sense of self-preservation and financial acuity. They were young, playing games, exploring options, and acting things out. They were the children, or the much younger siblings, of the "soixante-huitards", the rebels of 1968. Even if their own parents, or other relatives, had not participated in, or subscribed to, the values associated with the French universities' revolt of May 1968, it was nevertheless there, a symbol of freedom which those some twelve to twenty years ahead of them had managed to attain. But the initial fun of it was gone. The counter-culture had bequeathed them travel, drugs, and sexual freedom: now almost routinized into bourgeois recreational activities, packaged by capitalism [11], and increasingly difficult to finance as unemployment grew.

There were exceptions to this. The extreme Arthur-types, spent little time at the hostel. They either left the

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11 Sydney Cohen and Laurie Taylor, in Escape Attempts, (1992:164) point out that the symbolic manifestations of the counter-culture are extremely vulnerable to immediate commercial repackaging, for selling to young people who can then enjoy the ersatz thrills of dropping out, without the inconveniences of the real thing.

country (if they were not French, they quickly saw New Caledonia as an unwelcoming place to be) or disappeared into squats with other hostellers, or shared minimal housing with Polynesian or Kanak squatters or slum-dwellers on the outskirts of Nouméa. Often they appeared to have some psychological problems that prevented them from fitting easily into normal society. Some, like Arthur, joined Nouméa's flotsam of barflies and squatters, perhaps never to emerge from them again.

As has already been discussed, the travellers were often characterised by a fixation on short-term experience, even though the intensity of this might differ from person to person. A number of them had been, or were obsessed with, going to Thailand (or, sometimes, the Philippines). This was mainly because Thailand was a source of drugs, in which they were primarily interested for their personal consumption. [This was implied rather than actually said, cheap beaches, jungles and temples being complementary attractions.] They seemed to believe that because they had got away with doing something once they would continue to do so indefinitely, that if one policeman had failed to arrest them, this was a sign of the police's friendly feelings towards them.

Once I, and Gabriel (described below), pointed out that policemen might well have target figures to fulfill every so often; that they might dislike young, seemingly lay-about, Westerners; and that, were there a crackdown, the police

might decide to arrest them with or without evidence: planting soft or hard drugs on the grounds that if the travellers weren't in possession this time, they certainly had been in the past. The amazed silence that greeted us convinced me (as did other things) that, like most of us, many of the travellers were touring the world with a set of illusions that prevented them from seeing little except what they wanted to see. [I am not, of course, suggesting that I was free of bias: throughout my fieldwork I was acutely conscious of being affected by the throng of allegories, histories, and bits of ethnography, inside my head.]

Gabriel

If Arthur represented one extreme type of traveller, Gabriel, with his gentle eccentricity, represented another. Unlike Arthur, he did not appear to be addicted to anything, nor did he have any noticeably anti-social characteristics. I first saw Gabriel with seed husk rattles around his ankles, a pair of bongo drums in his hands. Prematurely grey curls, a comically melancholy face, an aged T-shirt, and earrings: Gabriel was about thirty. He ate but twice a day, a habit he had picked up while living with his jungle tribe in Thailand. There he smoked opium with the elders and lived in a hut. He was en-route to Paris. Once a year his parents sent him an air ticket to France so that he could see them. He was their only son, and was eventually going to go home to run the family business.

Gabriel played the drums late at night, burnt incense in a saucepan on the dormitory floor (so setting off the fire alarm),

and was extremely fond of drinking red wine as the sun went down. The night before his departure he gave a spectacular, noisy, party which combined kava, wine, and beer, with drums, guitars, and taped music.

Gabriel, Francis said to me, was a child. There was certainly something remarkably unselfconscious about him. He had been travelling through Vanuatu and showed me his photographs. Some had been taken in fairly remote areas. It seemed to me that he was not an overtly complicated, analytical, person. Perhaps it was exactly this quality of unreflective sunniness that enabled him to get on with the people he encountered.

If Arthur and Gabriel exemplified two particular kinds of travellers, many others had certain personal characteristics which I eventually came to see as typical.

Travel and the Construction of Self-Identity

Travellers, as already stated, saw travel as an experience through which they could construct their self-identity. It was as if, to misapply Cohen's comments on working-class Mods (Downes and Rock 1988:157-8) the travellers were attempting "to realize, *but in an imaginary relation*" international travel as a "rite de passage", one often associated with wealthy bourgeois culture. "While their angst and ritual forms stressed many of the values of their parent culture, their dress and music reflected the hedonistic image of the affluent consumer."

Their ideas of the experiences, and of the social and other advantages, to be gained through future travel, and of other travellers' experiences and personalities, were necessarily limited and imprecise. These were clarified through endless conversations in which the travellers compared where they had been and what it had cost. Clustered together in the hostel, they could evaluate and model themselves on each others' behaviour. [This adoption of group, subcultural, behaviour might be seen as individual defences against anxiety. Hence the frequent opportunistic stealing, which appeared to spring from an attitude that, if other people did it, why shouldn't they?]

The emphasis on cost was not just a reflection of the travellers' limited resources. It came from a desire to acquire as many prestigious experiences as possible, good value for money, as well as from self-presentation to other travellers (knowing how to save money was the mark of the old hand).

As Campbell says (1987: 86, 87, 90, 203-210), modern consumption is a form of hedonism entangled with romanticism. The individual's interest is primarily focussed on pleasure, through the meanings and images imputed to a product (in this case, the imagined joys of travel). In reality, these are never quite as anticipated, so a fresh search for pleasure begins. Travel then becomes individual consumption of the experiences of people and places, an autonomous self-illusory hedonism whose dynamic is the alternation of

anticipation and partial disillusionment. [Total disillusionment would mean the end of travel.]

Although partly a question of temperament, from a sociological viewpoint it is frequently argued that one of the characteristics of the middle, as opposed to the working, classes is the ability to defer instant gratification in favour of long-term advantages. From another point of view, this depends on how people calculate their life chances. Youth, and the end of formal education, are the points at which social pressures force an entry into the capitalist market-place, where people must compete to sell their talents. It is the point at which those who lack social capital, and whose educational qualifications are devalued by oversupply and competition, experience disillusion and resentment, attempting to restore their personal and social integrity by a complete refusal of the social finitude of "the system" (Bourdieu 1984: 133, 142-4). [Similar points are made by Theodore Zeldin in The French (1983: 422-27), except that he emphasises that, despite dislike of "the system", most young people are more timid, and less rebellious, than their elders seem to think.]

Resistance to "the system" can be expressed in delinquency or deviance (an argument used by radical criminologists: Downes and Rock 1988: 247-8), or in travel. Travel, then, is an escape route, however temporary, from routinization. It is a response to the ever-threatening impact

of society, including the feeling of being "caught" (as such it can be compared to astrology, something which will be discussed in more detail later: see Theodor W. Adorno "The Stars Down to Earth" 1994:114-5). It is a form of learning because its freedom offers choices, which bring in spontaneity and creativity. As a form of learning, it can also be, in several senses, a means of social aspiration. Travel is simultaneously an additional luxury for those whose lives stretch comfortably before them, and an escape route for those who have managed to save some money but whose futures appear limited and dull.

Travel is also one of the experiential areas in which the bourgeoisie can stake its claim to what it considers its rightful social position by obtaining and displaying cultural knowledge which cannot be acquired by the alternative route of formal education. Bourdieu (1984: 91-93) says that the access of the lower classes to education (combined, I would argue, with new technology), allows a fast route to prestigious cultural knowledge that was previously obtained only through slow experience in particular places (eg art history no longer relies almost exclusively on the comparative knowledge obtained through endless visits to galleries, museums, and, or, private collections). This means that the bourgeoisie have to stake their claim to social position, "distinction", through table manners and numerous other cultural practices, such as sports and hobbies, which may or may not be expensive, but which are separate from formal education.

For most of the hostellers, however, travel was less a

means of class mobility through the accumulation of legitimate cultural capital for future display (eg knowledge of ancient ruins, beautiful cities, famous monuments and art galleries) than a counter-cultural manifestation by new-style autodidacts, who were attempting to free themselves from the constraints of the scholastic market (Bourdieu 1984:96). This included meeting like-minded individuals, fellow travellers, in far-flung locations. Most of the travellers seemed convinced that going around the world somehow made them into better and more worthwhile people than those who stayed at home - or, perhaps, than they themselves would have been had they stayed at home. Presumably this was because they were aware of the efforts they had made to travel, and also because they believed that travel, because of its (limited) dangers, in itself demonstrated, or brought about, broad-mindedness, creativity, and a spirit of adventure.

The cultural competences the travellers acquired were also personal competences: bravery, resourcefulness, cunning, plus a nodding acquaintance with exotica. These ranged from natural wonders, famous landscapes, to the consumption of new people and places, symbolised by unusual, ethnic, food, drink, and other substances (to be discussed in more detail later). [For example, nearly everyone who had been or was going to Australia had seen, or was planning to see, Ayers Rock.] [However, I noticed that most people, despite their travels, preferred to cook familiar French food when staying in the hostel, rather than experiment. This was because the hostel was a safe haven in a strange world and because French

food was considered to be indisputably the best.]

The travellers' personal characteristics can be seen as class-related, although only in a very loose way. Arthur, for example, with his art-school training and knowledge of furniture, and his conversational references to "culture", was undoubtedly bourgeois (Bourdieu 1984: 89-92, 141), even if he perhaps exaggerated this as a way of making a good impression and boosting his morale. Although the travellers ranged from the son of an ambassador to the son of a "polytechnicien"[12] to the son of a peasant, nearly all the teachers, nurses and manual workers, on working stop-overs, were "petit bourgeois", from the lower middle or working classes. So were the workers who hoped to settle in New Caledonia. As far as I could tell, so were many of the long-term travellers, the ones who had voyaged for years.

The characteristic which, I argue, is most likely to be class-related, was the value that they put on experience as opposed to formal education, what Bourdieu (1984: 74-75) describes as the opposition between domestic and scholastic learning of culture. This was not just because of their personal interests and aptitudes. It was because they were either disillusioned with and devalued by the educational system (as mentioned earlier) or because they were not what Bourdieu (1984: 122, 132-3, 142-3, 283-291) calls the dominated fraction of the dominant class, such as teachers' children and other members of those sub-sectors of society

12 A graduate of the socially and academically prestigious Ecole Polytechnique.

which, being rich in cultural but not necessarily social or economic capital, value formal education far more than some other sectors do.

Many people find learning from experience more interesting than long drawn-out, expensive, further and higher education. For example, one hosteller, Vincent, who was working in New Caledonia to earn money for the next stage of his trip around the world, told me that he did not understand how I could bear to spend so much time studying when there were so many more interesting things to do. He had longed to leave school at the earliest opportunity, to go around the world: he had learned so much from his travels that no other experience could have given him.

Some travellers, like Vincent, may have disliked school and left as soon as possible. Others were educated to, rarely beyond, first degree level, or had vocational qualifications. They did not want to go further, as far as I could tell: this was less to do with ability or financial commitment than with general outlook. [It may also have reflected a disenchantment with the highly bureaucratic and impersonal nature of the French educational system.] To continue the parallels with astrology, travel is a sort of intellectual short-cut, an ideal stimulus for those who have started to reflect on the opacity of social processes, are dissatisfied and looking for a key: but at the same time lack the intellectual training required for sustained theoretical insight (Adorno 1994:120). Frequent physical movement and cultural diversity ultimately encourage

such people to accept things as they are, rather than over-reflect, or react, to particular social processes.

This interpretation of travel raises all sorts of questions, such as the nature of the self and the extent to which it is a social product, which go beyond the scope of this thesis. The main point which I am trying to make is that action and belief, theory and experience, affect each other. The travellers' tendency not to analyze their individual experiences recalls Bourdieu's comments (1984:32-41) that high culture is resisted by the working and middle classes because of the distance it places between self and object (which interferes with what Campbell calls the illusory nature of modern hedonism). In other words, the close and rationalistic analysis of experience helps destroy its charm, which is rooted in both memory and fantasy and their elision of blemishes. The inner-directedness of fantasy allows the hedonist (traveller) to identify his or her self with an ideal self-image. This ideal self must be bolstered and protected by some external proof obtained by conduct in the world: it must be validated by others. This in turn can be traced back to romantic individualism and ideas of the true, essential, self (Campbell 1987: 83-88,183-7, 213-216, 269).

To re-direct Myerhoff's comments (1975: 53-57) from hippy experiences of drug-taking to the travellers' experiences of travel, when travel becomes part of a group experience (ie when travellers get together to travel or to talk), deep analysis is rejected because of the public nature of language.

Language fixes experience (labels it), diminishes the subjectivity and privacy of unspoken experience, and makes it increasingly apparent that people's experiences differ, so destroying communal feelings and opening possible conflicts. Ambiguity is essential because it allows people to continue projecting their most intense emotions into particular experiences.

Adorno (1994: 114-5) points out that social reality is psychologically difficult to accept (especially for those lacking economic and social status). This can be seen in the way most travellers avoided intellectualization and prioritised experience as a mode of knowing, seeing understanding as coming primarily through the activities of the body. Most were not concerned with issues which did not impinge very directly on their everyday lives. They had broken away from people, and the places where they had grown-up, to move into a seemingly freer space elsewhere.

The travellers' resistance to theory can be seen in the way most of them had abandoned books at a fairly early stage. Except for those few travellers obsessed with keeping their maps and journals, literature had no great importance in their lives. Consequently, many of them were slightly baffled by anyone who genuinely liked books and arguments, but immediately generous and comprehending towards anyone who roamed the world trying to fit it all. It was as if they felt that the purpose of life were somehow to accumulate as many experiences as possible, presumably to an unknowable end, but

also, I suppose, to maximise enjoyment of the present: a kind of zen mindfulness of living in the moment (and consequent mental displacement of ageing, sickness and death). A corollary of this naturalistic romanticism was that very often their plans were directed towards specific short-term goals: the future left cloudy upon some great dim horizon. Although people varied in the degrees to which this was true of them, it was certainly true of the majority.

This refusal to be over-concerned with the future carried into other areas of their lives. For example, the travellers displayed no signs of conventional Christian (Protestant or Roman Catholic) eschatological religious beliefs or practice, but they were often interested in the Dalai Lama, or the Baha'is, or things New Ageish. This is not just because the latter were interesting and exotic, while the former were more or less familiar and boring. Christianity focussed on finitude, the others on cycles of renewal.

In this, the travellers were like the majority of hostellers, who displayed general indifference towards, rather than intellectual rejection of, Christianity and more conventional religious beliefs. For some of them, religion was something which they had left behind, with their parents: others had grown up in a secular environment [13].

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13 Alain Woodrow, in "The beliefs of the French" (1994), states that in January 1994 an opinion poll found that 72% of the adult population declared a belief in the existence of God. French society was sharply divided by age, the under-fifties cut off from traditional ideas of God and organised religion, the over-fifties generally adhering to them. 64% described themselves as Catholics, 9% as "practising" Catholics. 89% of French people thought that religious belief was irrelelvant to ethical behaviour.

The travellers' beliefs and interests ranged from Tibetan Buddhism to Chinese or Western astrology, to experiments with the power of crystals, fortune-telling with the Tarot, and, finally, a French adherent of the Australian branch of the Raelian movement. [The Raelian movement was started by Rael, alias Claude Varilon. His abduction by aliens in 1973 persuaded him that mankind was implanted on earth by humanoids from a higher technological wavelength than our own ("Jingle Bells" 1994).]

It seemed to me that such beliefs contained a strong element of play and experimentation: I was never sure to what extent people took them seriously. To summarize Adorno (1994: 50-51), such beliefs may be accepted with a kind of playfulness and mental reservation which tolerantly acknowledges its basic irrationality and its disciples' own aberration. But it is also an intellectual short-cut which indicates both a lack of intellectual integration and expanding semi-erudition: by providing answers it absorbs, channels ,and focusses free-floating anxiety in terms of objects of reality.

As Bruno Bettelheim puts it in The Uses of Enchantment [(1976): 50-51], late adolescence is a period when beliefs in

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Young people between the ages of 18 and 24 were particularly attracted by the supernatural. 53% of them had claimed to encounter it. 16% believed in reincarnation, 67% in astrology, 61% in witchcraft and 60% in fortune-tellers. Theodore Zeldin makes similar points, pointing out that that most of those believing in astrology etcetera are educated young people. "France now has twice as many professional astrologers and fortune-tellers as priests, and it is the same in the USA..." (An Intimate History of Humanity 1994:339).

magic, drugs, astrology, gurus, etcetera flourish among those deprived of magic and fantasy in childhood. "It is as if these young people feel that now is their last chance to make up for a severe deficiency in their life experience; or that without having had a period of belief in magic, they will be unable to meet the rigors of adult life." I am not, of course, suggesting that even the youngest hostellers were chronologically adolescent. But there is no clear demarcation between late adolescence and the period of youth marked by travel and quests for identity.

Those observing the travellers - Lucien, Elisabeth, Francis, and I - reacted differently. I was never quite sure what to make of them. Elisabeth and Francis, as discussed before, were profoundly disillusioned. Lucien, an anthropologist, had arrived at the hostel about a year after I did. He claimed, like Francis and Elisabeth, that the generality of travellers were deeply different from their predecessors. Previously, people had been so carefree. Now, they were so serious. Basically, they were the children of the recession, short-term travellers, interested in jobs, money.

Nearly all the travellers were convinced that an interest in other cultures meant that anthropologists were people like them. Personally, I rarely identified with travellers (this will be discussed in more detail later). Lucien, however, did.

Lucien was an ex-traveller turned anthropologist, a "soixante-huitard" whose cultural and ethical relativism

appeared rooted in hedonism. Travel was a question of accumulating as many experiences as possible: anthropology gave him arguments to justify them. The hostel was a place where he could meet like-minded people, as well as somewhere to stay when he returned from his field-trips to the far north.

Lucien got on well with Elisabeth and Francis. They, like several of the transients and residents of the hostel, appeared to have no permanent roots. She was Hungarian, he was French, and they lived in a country foreign to both of them. Although New Caledonia had a large number of French metropolitan immigrants, Francis and Elisabeth were comparatively isolated, with no immediately visible social network into which they could fit. They had some friends, but generally kept them away from the hostel. Experience had taught them not to mix business and pleasure: this was ironic, given that their initial takeover of the hostel was partly due to their liking for travellers.

Elisabeth wanted to be a doer, not a thinker. She once said to me that she admired people who would get up and do things (as opposed to those who sat and thought). Along with this emphasis on immediate bodily experience, both she and Francis had a strong aversion to discussing any subjects which went below the immediate surface of life. This may or may not have been because they found them boring, or, perhaps they considered them to be too personal. They both detested intellectualization as a waste of time and, although they

would happily comment on sexuality and people's personal habits, they shied violently away from even the most casual remarks on psychology, philosophy, death and religion. [This may have had something to do with a sort of unwillingness to commit, an unconcern with the future, a rejection of what they perceived to be constraints upon their personal autonomy.]

Like many of the more comfortably off travellers, Elisabeth and Francis claimed that they were not materialistic, having all that they wanted. To me it seemed that they had money in the bank, and a small but comfortably pleasant house, suited to two youngish people. I was never sure to what extent this claim was true, nor against what standards Elisabeth and Francis were making it.

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THE MISFITS: STAYING ON

As Elisabeth and Francis frequently said, the hostel was for travellers, not for those unable to find somewhere to live. People on long-term working stopovers, people who had come to New Caledonia to live, were not encouraged to stay on, once they had found regular employment. In any case, the cumulative irritants of dormitories, stealing, and lack of privacy were enough to deter most people who could afford something else.

Moving out

Moving out was not always the ideal solution, as can be seen by the stories of Carmel and Maurice, Elfride and Odette. Carmel was in her mid-twenties, a girl from a prosperous Guernsey background who had come over from Sydney to teach at the English Language School and, who, alone of all the non-French nationals who passed through the hostel, had managed to obtain a work and residence permit.

It was not just discontent with her job that made Carmel dislike New Caledonia. She arrived, as nearly everyone did, at the hostel, but fairly soon she bought herself a car and then obtained a six-month "gardiennage" on a small suburban house. I initially agreed to share it with her but then realised that I couldn't afford the rent. However, Maurice, a garage mechanic with whom, among others, I had visited Lifou, was looking for somewhere to live and eagerly agreed to take my

place. The main condition of the gardiennage was that whoever had it should look after the lady owner's three cats. Pride of the trio was Felix, a neutered but splendidly handsome tom whose thick, long, lustrous hairs betrayed his Persian origins. His mistress had left six months supply of tinned catfood and of long-life milk for the cats' delectation.

Both Carmel and Maurice used to visit the hostel on a fairly regular basis and their complaints soon became familiar. Carmel was in New Caledonia to make some money before continuing her travels. The problem was that although she was well-paid, the cost of living was so high that it was less easy to save money than she anticipated as she was not willing to sacrifice her social life, which centred mainly on restaurants, bars and nightclubs. Maurice, from a poor peasant background, was a year or so younger than she was, and earned far less as a mechanic than she did as a teacher. He was, in addition, truly mean with money, as I had discovered from observing his grudging behaviour towards Celeste (discussed later) and other Kanaks who offered us hospitality, when he, I and another hosteller, visited Lifou. He was aghast at Carmel's extravagance and her expensive food bills. She, for her part, claimed that he stole from the refrigerator, and, more specifically, drank Felix's milk.

Carmel and Maurice soon hated each other to such an extent that nobody was willing to share with either of them and so they were forced to remain together. Just how could Carmel tell such lies about him? demanded Maurice. And even

if what she said were true, how could she deny him a drop of milk? How could she be so mean?

Carmel, for her part, bitterly resented anyone taking financial advantage of her, "people living off my back." This, at first, was aimed not just at Maurice but more specifically at just about everyone she met while staying at the hostel, and particularly at her boyfriend, Jean-Loup.

Jean-Loup arrived from Sydney, where he had been sleeping rough on a beach, at about the same time that Carmel did. I do not know under what circumstances he left Australia but I presume that he ran out of money and, being French, hoped that New Caledonia would improve his finances. After some difficulty he found a very poorly paid teaching position in a Catholic mission school near Poindimié, where most, if not all the pupils, were Kanaks. He hitchhiked down to Nouméa to spend the weekends with Carmel.

Carmel claimed that Jean-Loup had no regard for her; he cared nothing for her and only slept with her because it gave him the chance of a free weekend in Nouméa, without having to pay for a night's lodging at the hostel. I protested: I was sure that wasn't true, Jean-Loup wouldn't do that. But Carmel's complaints continued throughout their relationship; if they went to a bar, he parked her in the corner and went to talk to his friends. She wanted him to talk to her and be attentive. She wanted him to take her out to meals and (although she never used the phrase) to treat her like a lady.

But Jean-Loup, as I forbore pointing out, was no gentleman, in the sense that he did not come from a background resembling Carmel's and did not share her concept of good manners. Unlike Carmel, he was an adventurer with very little money, and, although he always struck me as tough, pleasant and straightforward, it now seems to me that Carmel's comments may have been true. Carmel, after she had broken up with Jean-Loup, picked up people easily (although not people from the hostel) and then dropped them, constantly complaining that they didn't know how to behave and took advantage of her generosity and good nature. The only person of whom she approved was an ambassador's son who was travelling round the world but whose stay in New Caledonia was cut short when he had to return to France because of his mother's illness. In Carmel's relationships, social, cultural and ethnic differences were revealed by her complaints. She had money and spent freely: her boyfriends hadn't; she consequently complained that they were unappreciative and uneducated. She took the social and sexual initiative and then complained that she wasn't treated with proper respect. Finally, she left New Caledonia when her visa and other problems became increasingly complex, to the relief of Maurice who then moved into a warehouse squat. Carmel's and Maurice's last act together was to relinquish the house to its owner, against whom they indignantly united after being told that it was dirty and they hadn't looked after it properly. Felix returned to his mistress's arms, svelte from lack of milk.

Elfride was another hosteller, with troubles of a different kind. Elfride was in her early thirties: she often appeared older but this was not, I think, so much because of her sun-damaged fair hair and skin but of certain attitudes which distinguished her from many of the other hostellers. Elfride craved love and respectability: she had an idea of what being grown-up entailed and longed to achieve it. At the risk of indulging in casual psychologisms, rarely have I known somebody whose adult disturbances could so clearly be traced back into childhood.

Elfride's father was a French banker, her Swiss mother an artist. The divorce of this seemingly ill-matched pair culminated in Elfride's mother remarrying and taking Elfride to live with her stepfather in the United States when she was thirteen. Exactly what happened then was never quite clear to me. [Elfride recounted her life to me in dribs and drabs: it was not a story I felt able to probe.] Elfride's hippy mother became involved in communes, free love and drug-taking. The details of Elfride's tales of maternal sexual assault and LSD tripping (her mother gave her a first tablet when she was fifteen) may or may not have been exaggerated. What was certain was that Elfride's education had been neglected: she left school at an early age, married very young and went off with her French husband to run a wind-surfing school in Santo Domingo. She had two daughters. In her late twenties she divorced and finally went to live in Australia, from whence, her latest romance at an end, she came to New Caledonia. Exactly why she came, I was not sure, but it was partly because she hoped

that by establishing herself in a French colony, she could earn the money to create the kind of settled comfortable home which would persuade a French court to give her, rather than her ex-husband, custody of her daughters.

Elfride could rattle along perfectly in French, German, Spanish or English: but writing them was a different matter. She was conscious of this and tried to hide it. She was frightened of bureaucrats, of people "who had a lot of power", because, I think, she felt that forms put her at a disadvantage. She was intimidated by Carmel, who initially shared a room with her and with Odette. Carmel let Elfride know that she, at least, had had a decent education, and was patronisingly sarcastic about Elfride's attempts at self-improvement, which consisted of reading "good" books of serious fiction.

Elfride was desperate to find work and after a while found herself a job as bar manageress at what was then probably the largest and most expensive hotel in New Caledonia, along the beach-front at Anse Vata. Elfride's stylishness, her easy social charm, reminded me of those expatriate company wives whom I had met in my late teens, whose constant entertaining was sometimes lubricated by a flow of alcohol, but who always knew that they must support their husbands' careers and do the right thing. It seemed to me that Elfride modelled herself on a slightly old-fashioned idea of womanhood, probably picked up in Santo Domingo; she was, for example, fond of referring to herself as "a woman of a certain age" although she was no older than many of the other

hostellers.

Elfride's probationary period at the bar was marked, very early on, by an accidental discharge of acid from a dishwashng machine which burnt her foot so badly that for long afterwards chunks of dead tissue were being cut out at the Gaston Bourret hospital. Taking only three days off work, she hobbled back to work with a massively bandaged foot which suppurated for weeks. So Elfride kept her job, with a fortitude which won her the admiration of everyone who knew her.

Elfride's spare time was spent intermittently with a group of young men from the hostel, who went drinking in a bar in the Quartier Latin, decorated with pictures of the comic-strip hero Corto Maltese, which attracted people with boats. Boats and windsurfing were what Elfride liked.

After a few months, Elfride decided to leave the hostel and share a studio with Odette, near the hotel. Odette was a nurse who worked at various clinics before accepting a post at the psychiatric hospital in Nouville. Like Pascal the accountant, Thierry the dentist, and one or two other people, she had done the colonial tour, going to different colonies. Her qualifications as a nurse meant that she could only work in French colonies. Odette had terrible asthma, which she had been told would one day kill her. She had come to New Caledonia looking for a dry sunny climate in which to live and appeared to be completely on her own. She was in her early to mid-forties, with a deep tan and gold chains contrasting with

her white designer T-shirts, and gold rings on her fingers. She was unfriendly towards nearly everyone, and although she liked going to the cinema, she gave the impression of being interested in very little apart from money. Occasionally she referred to her experiences in Guiane: mostly brief comments on the filth and savagery of the Indians, and the goodness of the Jesuit fathers who went upriver to see them. Elfride was one of the few people who liked her, a liking which may have sprung up during Odette's several asthma attacks at the hostel, when she would be rushed to hospital in the middle of the night. New Caledonia, despite its sunshine, had a cool rainy season, with humidity and damp: but where else, to earn a living, could Odette go? Her asthma ensured that people tolerated her: her offhand manner may have ensued from the knowledge that she was facing death with no one to care for her.

As Elfride once said to me, she and Odette were both "women of a certain age...". so presumably they had things in common. But from the few occasions when I saw Elfride again, I gathered that things were not going well at the hotel, that its internal politics entailed sleeping with the right people, to keep one's job: hard work did not really come into it.

Some months later I heard that Elfride was moving out of the studio and looking for a new tenant: then that she was in the hospital at Nouville after a suicide attempt, job, finances, and lover having somehow all gone disastrously wrong. They let her out occasionally: once I saw her in the street, and also

in the hostel. Elisabeth did not encourage her visits. Once when I was out Elfride came and left me a note on torn lined paper, in dreadful jagged writing: she had come twice to see me but I was not in.

Elisabeth told me she was disappointed in Elfride: when she had first met her she had liked her enormously, had thought she was somebody who would do a lot of things "qui allait faire énormément de choses". When I said that I had promised to visit her, Elisabeth told me emphatically that I should stay away; she had visited Nouville and the things that Elfride had told her had so upset Elisabeth that she felt as if her head would burst and was unable to concentrate on her own work. [Elisabeth said she had visited somebody in Nouville but from the way she spoke and a couple of subsequent conversations I was sure that it was Elfride.] The only person who could help Elfride was someone who loved her, a sister perhaps, who was willing to give the enormous time and effort Elfride needed. Some time later, Francis said that Elfride's disorder was probably cyclical; something she had had before and would have again. Otherwise, why hadn't she been given custody of her two children?

The last thing I heard was that Elfride was being let out on day-trips, was desperate for money (and hence had no alternative but to remain in Nouville) and had asked her father for help.

Staying on

For every group of travellers or workers who moved out of the hostel there were one or two people who stayed behind. Generally, the longer they stayed, the more unsuccessful they were.

When I look back at the hostel, it has a compressed almost circus-like quality. Not only those who left but those who stayed, not just the Sydneyites, but other social groups among the workers and travellers, contained misfits whose personal eccentricities often manifested some psychological problem. Elisabeth frequently said of them that the hostel was the elephants' graveyard. These problems, I realized, as I observed people's desperate struggles to find and retain work, or their attempts to find a place for themselves, were usually as much induced by their surroundings as by any profound psychological disturbance or weakness. People got caught up in vicious spirals of personal and social disaster beyond their control, which were often aggravated by their personal responses to stress.

All these people, and very many others, had their stories to tell. But nearly all of them had the tinges of sadness and desperation recounted here.

Nearly all the misfits either stayed at the hostel for six months or more, or came and went, having literally nowhere else to go. Elisabeth and Francis displayed a sporadic kindness, mingled with irritation, towards them. Some had psychological problems, tolerated according to whether or not

Elisabeth and Francis sympathised, or considered them to be serious. [For example, there was a young man who lurked on the staircases at night, and followed women into the showers, or elsewhere, groaning loudly and masturbating. To the intense annoyance of his victims, neither Elisabeth or Francis took this seriously.]

Anyone who was suspected of being dangerous was got rid of. These included a wild-eyed young man who travelled with a case full of sharpened kitchen knives, and kicked Sydney the cat. There was also an Australian singer who specialised in children's television, claimed to have seen his wife and small son killed in a car crash, had been deported from Vanuatu (and was later deported from New Caledonia), it was said, for molesting little boys. He left the hostel after a week or so, having attacked Francis with the pole of a garden parasol. Accounts of his activites filtered back to the hostel, provoking heated discussions at the kitchen table. [Castration, "Il faut leur couper la queue!", was the general verdict.] Some of these people were former drug users, which may or may not have affected their behaviour. Others were simply defeated by the circumstances in which they found themselves.

The failure to find work was the most common cause of psychological disturbance. As discussed earlier, New Caledonia was a harsh environment for those who lacked either special skills, or contacts. The middle-aged were particularly vulnerable. Their financial demands and domestic responsibilities were greater: they were frequently divorced,

with children in their late teens or early twenties. They had less opportunities for employment than younger people. In particular, three French commercial travellers, in their late forties, early fifties, spent a long time at the hostel.

Arnaud, Baptiste, and Lorenzo, formed a kind of defensive alliance. They were desperate to make money, convinced that selling the right products was the way to do it. Baptiste had been in Australia and elsewhere in the Pacific. Lorenzo had been working for a mining company in Papua New Guinea and Australia. [I presume that they had come to New Caledonia because their visas ran out.] Arnaud was a hopeless, despairing, drunk who apparently lived on remittances from France and shared a dormitory with Baptiste. At some stage they all slept in the same room, but eventually Lorenzo and Baptiste quarrelled over some financial matter. Baptiste was widely held to have cheated Lorenzo, who muttered darkly about revenge.

Baptiste, according to Elisabeth, was also an alcoholic, "en cachette". In their dormitory lockers she had found an enormous stash of empty whisky bottles. Lorenzo appeared to be, and was, I think, the most balanced of the lot. Arnaud slavishly followed Baptiste, the only person who would pay any attention to him as he sat at the kitchen table raving about his royalist youth in Paris, when he threw left-wingers out of windows onto the pavement below. [All of which may have been fantasy.]

Lorenzo and Baptiste had a scheme to import high-quality IMCO Waterless saucepans from Switzerland and sell them to the Caledonians. They had a display set which Lorenzo showed me in great secrecy. Unfortunately, they were extremely expensive, averaging roughly £100 per saucepan. My belief, that they would only be bought by people about to set up a restaurant, was ill-received. Lorenzo gave me lectures on how an anxious mother would always wish to ensure that her family ate the best possible food, economically cooked in one of his vapour-only, lifetime-guaranteed saucepans. I sometimes translated Baptiste's publicity material into English, as he hoped to corner the Australian market. This arrangement stopped, after he refused to pay me the agreed price. He then tried the same trick on a translation agency and was thrown out of their office.

None of their schemes ever came to anything. Baptiste initially pretended that he was staying at a hotel rather than the hostel, but this misfired after Elisabeth took a call for him in which she was addressed as his secretary. Lorenzo became friendly with Bernard, who later hanged himself. Bernard was convinced that Lorenzo could help him sell some gold jewellery. Both Bernard and Lorenzo eventually moved out of the hostel. Lorenzo allegedly obtained a job in, and a girlfriend from, Maré. When I left New Caledonia, he was still sometimes seen in town.

Baptiste and Arnaud stayed at the hostel, and spent a great deal of time washing their clothes, and quarrelling in

public. After a while, it was discovered that Baptiste was responsible for the mysterious disappearance of clothes pegs from the lines, having squirrelled them away for his own use, inside a hollow pole. People would stage elaborate clothes-pegs hunts, while Baptiste would sputter with helpless anger. When I departed, he was away from the hostel; what happened to him I do not know.

Perhaps the most pathetic of all the hostellers was Celeste. Like Triji, (see Chapter 21) she was from Lifou and uneasy in her own society. Her case was worse than his. She had left New Caledonia at the age of ten, and grown up in Paris. At a time when very few Kanaks had even the baccalauréat, she obtained a science degree. She participated in university occupations and demonstrations with Nidoish Naisseline and other Kanaks present during "les événements" of May 1968. She married a French physicist (as cracked as she was, "aussi loufoque qu'elle", as Rekab's brother (Alceste) once said). They had two daughters, then divorced. Her ex-husband gave them little money. She had a post in a university library, and was then assigned as an assistant librarian to the university in Nouméa.

Celeste stayed at the hostel because there was nowhere else she could go. Recurrently in debt, she would stay with some family members until a fresh crisis led her to leave. Whether her salary was taken by her relations, her daughters, or whether, as Elisabeth said, she was completely unable to budget, I do not know. Her married sister lived in great poverty, as did the rest of her close family. Known to many

Kanaks, she was rejected by them. When she first came to New Caledonia, she claimed to be not Kanak but West Indian, "antillaise". Rather than go bareheaded, in the Kanak Mother Hubbard, "robe de popinée", she wore hats, West Indian style, with skirts and other European clothes.

Celeste was completely ill at ease in both French and Kanak society. She gave an impression of complete cultural disorientation. She could understand but no longer speak "drehu", her mother tongue. She occasionally displayed flashes of great charm, intelligence, and wit. Elisabeth claimed that she was crazy, although, to pick up someone else's words, Elisabeth would say anything about anyone, "n'importe quoi de n'importe qui". Elisabeth also claimed that she drank. She did, but comparatively little.

Celeste was often incoherent. This was less because of anything she actually said, than because of the softness of her voice, her embarrassed titter, and falls into silence as she realised that people were either ignoring, or laughing at, her. People tended not to make the effort to listen to her because they assumed that she was talking nonsense, jumping from one subject to another ("elle saute du coq à l'âne"). She wasn't. Her speech was sane, but full of cross-references.

Unpopular with her employers (as late and inefficient), the bane of Elisabeth's life ("she stinks!": "elle pue!"), Celeste was alternately laughed at and shunned. The hostellers who associated with her often took advantage of her generosity and

naivety, including selling her a car whose brakes had failed. A few months before I left New Caledonia, Francis filled up his van with her possessions, and deposited her with her relatives. A little later, she met a man whom she knew from his student days in Paris, when she was a librarian. She decided to share a house with him, and his girlfriend. As far as I know, it went well. Her story has a happy ending.

The Anthropologist

One sort of misfit remains: the anthropologist.

Anthropologists have been put into the sub-category of misfits because this was undoubtedly how Elisabeth, Francis, and many other people regarded me. They simply could not understand what I was doing there. People often asked me two questions: why wasn't I bored, and why didn't I leave the hostel? First, I was very rarely bored, although often miserable, frustrated, and poor. A second language gives an interest to the most banal remark. In addition, I was always meeting new people and picking up scraps of information.

I am quite sure that had I been French, rather than English, my reaction to the hostel, and to the whole of New Caledonia, would have been completely different. Lucien said to me that the reason for my fieldwork difficulties was that so many of my attitudes were so English: and that one particularly unco-operative person at the Bureau, disliked me because "he thinks you are a typical English lady". Sensitive to French Anglophobia, and "the Auld Alliance", I recalled my

Ayrshire great-great-grandparents, and a vague story about ancestors who lived in Spitalfields: and for several months told everybody that I had Scottish and Huguenot blood. [Although, on the basis of ancestry, I could equally well have claimed to be Welsh.]

[This is a common problem for English people: for instance, see Maryon McDonald (We are not French! 1989:119-121) who found it more comfortable to be either Irish or Welsh. Like McDonald (1989: 147-148), I found myself being lectured on the moral virtues of the IRA by Arthur (based on his experience of Sydney's Irish pubs), by Alceste (who added to it praise of Saddam Hussein, Iraq, and North Korea), and by others. The IRA was a subject which was brought up from time to time (not by me) whenever English-speakers appeared: for example, an Irish girl who went to Canala with a couple of hostellers at the New Year, found herself dancing with a Kanak who told her how much he liked Irish people, after he had met members of the IRA while he was training in Libya. I had several accidental encounters (after he was brought to the hostel by a casual acquaintance of his, a hosteller) with a Kanak called Friendly Eddy. Friendly Eddy, recently released from nine years of prison in France for involvement in the murder of a gendarme (and thought by several people to have mental difficulties) pursued me with postcards even after I had left New Caledonia, having mistaken my initial polite banalities for something more. Despite my unsympathetic response to his account of political oppression and suffering (in some countries, I said, he would have been hanged) he told

me how he had toured London with his friends from the IRA, whom he had met while in prison in France. Whether or not this was true, I'll never know.

Despite the incursions of Friendly Eddy, the hostel offered safety and companionship. It was affordable, flexible and in the centre of town. The vagaries of my grant cheques meant that I could prove no regular income (so I had a bank account but was not allowed a cheque-book). Nobody wanted to rent anywhere cheap to foreigners or give them the low-rent short-term "gardiennages " that some of the more fortunate French, ex-hostellers managed to acquire. In addition, any departure from the hostel, to a location in or near Nouméa, would have prevented my returning to it. [I would have been held to have established a permanent home in the area.] All my contacts were in Nouméa. I could not live anywhere outside Nouméa, as public transport was unreliable, or non-existent: I could not drive, or afford, a car. The hostel was used to dealing with travellers, with people who came and went, whose money was delayed in coming through, and who paid in travellers' cheques.

Neither the workers nor the travellers could work out what I was doing in the hostel, or New Caledonia itself, as I appeared to be neither working nor travelling. They pigeonholed me as an intellectual oddball. This was a problem throughout my time in New Caledonia. I did not want to announce my activities to all and sundry, as I became more and more aware of the complications surrounding them, and felt that

discretion was required : so I tried to keep a low profile and found that people assigned me identities. I discovered that I was taken for a teacher, a perpetual student (I would say that I was trying to improve my French, which was true), and a Pacific drifter. The waitresses at the Le Pandanus café (described below) thought I was an official from the Australian consulate.

At the hostel, many of the workers regarded further study as a waste of time, unless it opened the door to immediately lucrative careers. The travellers were usually less interested in careers, more in travel as a way of acquiring (semi-) Bohemian life experiences. As already stated, they tended to live in the present rather than distance themselves by analysing their experiences of other cultures. Few of them appeared to understand people who did otherwise.

Whatever the sociological and psychological reasons for this (there are as many reasons for travelling as there are travellers) we did not all have the same interests, motivations, experiences or conceptual frameworks. It was this, not just my wish that I, too, were as resourceful and resilient as they were, that eventually left me exasperated by them, as a group rather than individuals. Initially, nearly all of them would wrongly assume that I, too, not being French, was a traveller; then, that as an anthropologist, I shared their interests; those who enquired further could not see how I could possibly have had problems doing fieldwork, as the Kanaks, were so "cool"; nor could they understand, if I had had

problems, why I was still worried, and hadn't moved on. The general conclusion was that I couldn't really be doing a thesis - else why would I spend such a lot of time hanging around the hostel and listening to people's stories, giving them cups of coffee and home-made cakes? [An activity that led to my being referred to as "soeur Margaret".] I was the only hosteller who ever baked cakes. One woman said that it was a very English thing to do, French people bought pastries from pâtisseries but they didn't bake cakes for tea.

My thesis, then, was some sort of excuse for doing nothing. In any case, as Arthur told me, ignoring my protests, everyone knew that England had the worst educational system in Europe. My being from London University impressed nobody, as French universities were considered inferior to the "grandes écoles" where real, prestigious academic research took place. One woman urged me to study the books in the Bibliothèque Bernheim: she did not believe me when I said that I had read them, and said it was evident that I was not "une fille sérieuse".

14

DATA GATHERING AND PRESENTATION

Mood

There were several reasons for people's attitudes towards me. First, when I reached the hostel I was in a state of shock. Never, throughout all my time in Maré, had it occurred to me that Rekab might try to hit me in public. My perception of the situation had been severely shaken although not radically changed. I still thought of Rekab as a pushy person whose grandiose ambitions and overweening desire for power, money, and prestige had finally got the better of him, through his attempts to manipulate me. Therefore, my original strategy seemed the right one. Now I could persuade James or somebody else to speak to Rekab since he had clearly lost his head completely. They would surely see that the situation needed remedying: even if it were simply to stop me pestering them. After all, I was not really asking very much at all: just five minutes conversation with someone whom they occasionally saw (and who by now must have cooled down enough to recognize his act as madness and folly) and to whom it could be indicated that it would be better to leave me alone and just let me get on with my work.

This naive view and Pollyanna-like optimism sustained me for months and months: eventually things would be all right and I could get back to my work in Maré. The hostel was a place of refuge - not a new field site or a source of precise information - just somewhere where I could be safe, recover,

and learn to drive, while slowly working out what to do next. Because of this I went in for no formal note-taking: I just waited for things to get better, started to acquaint myself with the town of Nouméa and began to drift.

After my encounter with the old man who had told me I was going to live with him, I wondered whether the Cultural Committee would try to contact me at the hostel or even attack me in the street. Some months after I had been in the hostel, I suddenly saw Rekab in a back streets near the bus station. I don't think he saw me. Horrified, embarrassed and frightened, I immediately took a route that led me at least half a mile out of my way so as to return home by the most circuitous route possible and avoid all chance of bumping into him.

In the hostel, I told myself, I could relax. But, as time went on and my optimism began to founder (it became clear that the Bureau was not going to exert itself on my behalf), I began to realize that I was faced with an insoluble problem.

Among other things, I was eaten up by shame and anxiety. I had had an upbringing somewhat similar to that described in Beatrix Le Wita's (1994) French Bourgeois Culture, in which the world is presented to young people almost entirely in moral, rather than social or material, terms. This resulted in a tendency to see objective problems with subjective aspects as purely subjective ones, solutions to which were rooted in the personality of the individual. [An

outlook Adorno (1994: 57-8) ascribes to the reader of pop psychology and astrology: during this phase I read both, thumbing through magazines in search of instant answers.] Secretly, I felt that if I were a better and more worthwhile person this situation would never have arisen: I would have found a better way to handle it. However, with hindsight, I don't think that this was true. I don't think that, given Rekab's obduracy and absolute refusal to listen to anyone, any viable solution existed.

The most persistent worry in my life was how to overcome the problems with the Cultural Committee and get back to Maré to do fieldwork. After my funding had come through, I decided to write a report explaining my difficulties on the island. I was not really interested in researching the hostel because, as time went on, I had become less and less interested in the hostellers. Initially, I had expected to be there for just a short visit. I had enjoyed it because it was so much freer than Maré and I had never before been in such close and sustained contact with young French people. Although I struck up friendships with the residents, the transients gradually became less appealing. The hostel was like living in a public thoroughfare: the longer I stayed there, the more I was on display. Feeling exposed and isolated, branded with shame and failure, I skulked in corners and avoided inquisitive newcomers as much as possible.

Like Carmel, the longer I spent in the hostel, the more I suffered from the "living off my back" syndrome, the feeling

that people were somehow unkindly exploiting me. Yet whenever I systematically examined the causes of my resentment, I could see that this was not true but provoked by intermittent spill-overs of stress or irritation. It was not that people were nasty to me: it was just that my heightened sensitivity and constant anxiety prevented me from relaxing and responding to their kindness as I would otherwise have done; leading one young woman to say "Tu te mets toujours hors du groupe" when I had to leave one social gathering to make a telephone call.

Over time, people usually did reciprocate small acts of kindness, invitations, cups of coffee, etcetera. When things were not returned in kind, there was usually some equivalent, even if this were just the pleasure of their company. With some people, this never occurred, but generally things evened themselves out. If reciprocity, however tenuous and long-term, is the basis of social life, as Marcel Mauss (The Gift (1954)) and all subsequent anthropologists believe, it was difficult to prove an imbalance between my own actions and those of the hostellers, taken as a whole and averaged over time. I have no doubt that Rekab and perhaps some other Kanaks ultimately saw me as exploitative, even though I made every effort to balance things: that they felt that the nuisance of having me around outweighed any minor material advantages. Still, this was not the case in the hostel, where I paid the same rates, ate the same sort of food and participated in the same sort of activities as everybody else.

But for all the hostel's chatting and socializing, I still experienced bouts of acute misery, exacerbated by the fact that, after eight months, all my attempts at driving had ended in failure. This depressed me more than anything else, for an essential part of my envisaged return to Maré was with a car (having been dissuaded from trying a motorbike), in which I could be safe and able to drive to the aeroport, escaping from dependency on Rekab or his cronies. I had told myself that now, at last, overcoming previous setbacks, I would learn to drive. But almost fifty lessons and three driving instructors later, I gave up. Despite having passed the theory test at the first attempt, by three weeks concentrated memorizing of such details as when snow-tyres were required in the Alps, I was unable to tell left from right in moments of crisis. Nor was I helped by my instructors' evident loss of faith in my abilities. I was always going too fast or too slow. Urged by one to hurry up, I pointed to a road sign reading "Prudence! La vitesse tue!". Well, that certainly didn't apply to me, he snarled.

This depression was made worse by an attack of what was said to be the Hong Kong 'flu (which lasted for about four months, with bouts of fever interspersed with seeming recovery). It coincided with the discovery that I had wasted my efforts to persuade Jemes to intervene with Rekab, so that I could return to Maré: Jemes <u>had</u> spoken to Rekab, at the very beginning of my fieldwork. Rekab had refused to listen and then lied to me about it.

I had been sure that, once the situation in Maré was settled one way or the other, I would experience a rush of energy and be able to see my way clearly. This never happened. Instead, I was almost paralysed with despair. The absence of a settled, agreed, mutual compromise with the Cultural Committee meant that I could not easily return to Maré and resume my fieldwork, as I had hoped. There was nobody who could give me any official help or support, and I anticipated further problems with funding. I could not work out what to do next. I had literally run out of ideas and now I was running out of time and money.

Within this dragging inability to cope I tried to push myself out of my depression. I decided to extend my fieldwork until financial or other pressures forced me back home. From time to time I gave the hostellers English lessons and then decided to look for a job. I went to the Chamber of Commerce following an advertisement for freelance interpreters. Although I had no work permit, I was assured that these one-off assignments were unaffected by employment legislation, and that they would contact me. I passed the tests and heard nothing more. I anxiously perused Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes, local magazines and other ephemera. Like my fellow hostellers, I found myself spending more and more time trying to comfort myself, reading horoscopes and checking Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes' weekly predictions for Scorpios born in the year of the Goat. This was despite my not believing in astrology and knowing that, when the latest instalment failed to arrive from Paris, the newspaper regularly recycled

predictions from a few years back. Such was my longing for reassurance that I even had my horoscope-cum-Tarot done by computer in one of the boutiques in Ballande, leaving me chewing over cryptic references to mental anguish, old men, and chess pavilions. I then abandoned horoscopes as insufficiently optimistic, relying instead on Le Pandanus's coffee, and ice-cream, to cheer myself up.

I noted what people said to me and about me if it seemed significant. Yet, as someone who analyses while writing, when I have problems thinking, I have problems writing. Because I felt that I should get my feelings under control, I felt that anything worth writing needed to be clear and rational at the first attempt ("the idea that only he who behaves rationally, i.e. achieves complete control over his inner and outer life, has any chance of doing justice to the irrational contradictory requirements of the existent ... a tension inherent in social reality itself. " Adorno 1994: 42-43). All the time, while I was at the hostel, my depression grew. I sent out letters to my academic supervisors, which, like a message in a bottle, received no answers (a series of mishaps meant that several failed to reach their destination). A solitary air-mail arrived from Alfred Gell, with "Margaret, stop bleating!" written in lurid green ink and instructing me to study the hostel if nothing else were available.

I brooded over my childhood and wrote letters home with a hysterical over-brightness which recalled my days at boarding-school in Rhodesia, when the weekly letter was

copied from the blackboard by my nine year-old self:

"Dear Mummy and Daddy,

The weather is fine. I hope you are well and happy. I am.

..."

often accompanied by a code sheet and a carefully coded drawing, a crayoned border. I used to wonder anxiously whether my parents would decipher it (they never did).

I experienced extreme, unfamiliar, sensations of childhood abandonment and longing to be mothered. To what extent these showed on the surface, I don't know. In any case, the hostel, with its narrow, fenced-in, approach, lockable gates, communal bunk-rooms, shower-rooms, and refectory had an institutional quality which one French couple said reminded them of a cross between a prison and a boarding-school. For much of my time there, and in Maré, I had the feeling that I was living through a fast, jumbled, re-run of both childhood and adolescence.

Until I was twenty, much of my life had been spent outside England. My father worked abroad, and by the time I was eighteen I had been through eight schools of different nationalities. Two, in particular, made a profound impression on me. From seven to ten I attended boarding-school in Rhodesia, while my parents lived in Mozambique, then from eleven to fifteen I was a day-girl at an American school in Paris. It was during this period that I became most acutely aware of myself, as a teenage outsider in a society so critical of all outsiders, and developed ambivalent feelings towards

France and the French. These feelings carried over into New Caledonia, leaving me simultaneously sympathizing with the French, the Caldoches and the Kanaks. For most of the time, I loosely identified myself with the hostellers, although there were some differences between us.

When I was a little girl I longed and longed to go to school and not be taught at home by my mother: then at school I discovered that I was the only child there who loved reading and talking about ideas. Now, once again, I felt that I had bitten off more than I could chew: why had I believed that I could cope with Maré, a Melanesian agrarian society where nobody cared about books? Simply because The Coral Island had been one of my favourite stories when I was eight or nine, and I had thought that, when I grew up, I too would have adventures and visit the "Coral Islands of the Southern Seas" (Ballantyne (1857) n.d. :13). Like the travellers, I had wanted proof of an ideal self-image: the kind of grown-up I had imagined myself to be, when I was eight or nine or ten. But unlike the travellers, I fetishized knowledge rather than travel, and my world was mediated through texts. When I was little, I wanted a deep connection with other people but did not know how to do it, not realizing that not everybody shared my passion for books. So I grew into an observer rather than a participant.

Despite my inability to concentrate on any particular subject, I continued to observe, and to collect books, newspapers, and magazines, physical records of other people's

experiences. I took endless photographs, as I had throughout my time in New Caledonia, a risk-reducing stratagem to colonize personal space:

"The very activity of taking pictures is soothing and assuages general feelings of disorientation ... Unsure of other reponses, they take a picture." [Susan Sontag, quoted in John Urry Consuming Places 1995: 143.]

These physical records and their artistic composition gave me satisfaction. One picture was worth a thousand words, I told myself; and waited to feel better. I was sure that once my feelings were under control, everything would come into focus and I would know what to do. This never happened. I didn't feel better but I got to a stage when I felt that I had learned something, even though I couldn't put my finger on what it was. I felt that I had something to write about, even though I had no idea what: that out of this mass of material something would emerge. But about what, I had no idea. In short, I was in that state of diffused attentiveness that precedes (but does not necessarily produce) artistic creation and intellectual classification; the prelude to material struggling within you, trying to burst free.

It was in this listless state, that, to a greater extent than previously, I began to notice the hostellers. I had noticed them earlier on, in my first six months in the hostel, but then, being used to them, my immediate attention had flagged. In the last eight months or so that I spent in the hostel I became acutely aware just how much stress, threat, and suffering

people were undergoing and had undergone. Trapped by poverty and circumstance, they were like the unsuccessful immigrants and exiled prisoners of previous generations. Bernard, Arthur and Elfride were the ones whom I knew best, but they were only three among many. Like me, they had misplaced their faith in Time. They had relied too much on their hopes for a brighter future, remaining in New Caledonia until they were unable to get out.

Unlike them, I had the option of going home and eventually took it. Once I selfishly complained to Arthur that I was fed-up: he replied unsympathetically "You got stuck here, that's all. Lots of people get stuck here. And Margaret, time is running."

Like Bernard, Arthur and Elfride became fixed in my mind as dreadful warnings, as did "la vieille anglaise".

"La vieille anglaise" appeared briefly in the hostel around Christmas and New Year 1992. She was small and nondescript, with a colourless face and faded hair. Seeing her at the musical festival in Place des Cocotiers, I spoke briefly to her. She was in her late forties to early fifties: she had come from Australia to see her son, who was now eighteen years old. She had married a Vietnamese French national in Vanuatu who had then got custody of their son and had removed him to New Caledonia where he was beyond her reach. This desperate and complicated story sounded plausible to me. I mentioned it to Elisabeth, who confirmed it, yes, the woman

had been here before: then to another person I knew, a young man of amiable temperament. Not interested, he replied that the old Englishwoman was mad, "La vieille anglaise? Mais elle est folle, elle.", and it seemed to me that this was a foreglimpse of what might happen: no longer young and therefore unable to attract anyone's attention, I would end up in New Caledonia, hopelessly trying to resolve a situation which nobody cared about.

When I returned home to England, whatever else I tried to write, the hostellers intruded. I remembered the thin fresh scars on Elfride's wrists, and her body shaking as she looked for her pills. I thought of Arthur wanting to return to France but unable to swallow his pride enough to ask for, or risk the refusal of, a loan. I thought that I was very lucky. At the same time, attempts to write about Maré proved acutely muddled and painful, saturated with the consciousness of failure and blocked by vague, seemingly inapplicable, data and ideas that fell well short of theories. So finally I gave in and wrote about the hostellers, intending to write about the Kanaks afterwards. As soon as I did this the words began to drip, then trickle, like water from an unblocked pipe. So this is why this thesis is written the way it is.

Mood and Note-taking

At the same time as not formally gathering data I always felt that I would eventually be able to make sense of it all. I knew (having been told so before I began fieldwork and because I carried with me a copy of Roger Sanjek's (1990) Fieldnotes) that writing a thesis did not depend solely on recycling everything every detail you had learnt but that writing, like research was a continuous but uneven process, and seemed to take on its own momentum of patterning and interpretation. I knew of Kekule's dreams of the whirling dancers and of the snake with the tail in its mouth, showing that carbon atoms formed both rings and chains. I knew that insights took time to germinate and that all feelings and mental representations were ultimately forms of cognition that contributed to the interpretation of data (see, for example, Keith Oatley, "The Importance of being Emotional." (1989)). I also knew that the validity of data as a contribution to knowledge depended on its use and interpretation. It was not a question of legitimating methodology, of there being one absolutely right or wrong way to do things: social reality constantly overspilled the boundaries of texts and theories. All methodologies, all data, all interpretations were selective, synthesizing, sensitizing, constructs which would only take you so far.

Art, wrote Quintilian, originates from experience: memory supplies the details (Quintilian, also see Plato, Cicero, and Aristotle, cited in Frances A. Yates, The Art of Memory,1966: xi, 1-3, 21, 22, 32, 36). For the anthropologist, details come from fieldnotes, other records, photographic

images, artefacts and bits of recorded sound. But the pattern in which they are assembled relies on headnotes, remembered experiences which may not have been written down but which are essential for understanding the whole. The French psychologist, Paul Souriau, wrote in 1881:

"We know how the series of our thoughts must end, but ... it is evident that there is no way to begin except at random. Our mind takes up the first path that it finds open before it, perceives that it is a false route, retraces its steps and takes another direction ... By a kind of artificial selection, we can ... substanially perfect our own thought and make it more and more logical." (Souriau, quoted in William H. Calvin, "How to Think What No One Has Ever Thought Before", (1996:33).

It is the action of writing and re-writing that lets us analyze and make our thoughts more logical. Text creates a distance from experience (and is itself easier to produce when separated from events and people by time, space, and emotion), which allows for the production of an overall viewpoint and the placing of things in perspective. As many people have noticed, it is writing, not thinking alone, which brings one to conclusions: partly because writing is a form of presentation by which one attempts to explain things to oneself and other people. Yet viewpoints can shift over time, as my own did: when I started this thesis and found myself remembering the hostellers rather than the Kanaks, as if the hostellers were determined to haunt me until I had told the world about them. Simon Ottenberg discusses how his perceptions of his original fieldnotes and headnotes changed as he moved from youth to

maturity ("Thirty Years of Fieldnotes" 1990:139-142). Margery Wolf recounts how her increasing feminist consciousness made her re-appraise her fieldwork material ("Chinanotes" 1990: 347). C. Wright Mills expresses it well:

" ... you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work ... The sociological imagination ... consists of the capacity to shift from one perspective to another, ..." (The Sociological Imagination 1980: 216, 232).

As Weber (1949: 90-112) wrote, historical and other academic interpretation is essentially an artistic process. Edward Evans-Pritchard, in "Social Anthropology: Past and Present" (1962: 22-23) claimed that, in cultural translation, anthropology remains a literary and impressionistic art, although it emphasises structure so as to achieve sociological intelligibility. In agreeing with them, I would add one qualification: there are no conscious fictions in this work even if there are literary devices, such as typification and generalization. Although the data presented here is based on a mixture of letters, photographs, notes and memory, the knowledge I have of the hostellers is not sketchy or superficial. I spent a total of twenty months in the hostel, during which time there passed through it an estimated five thousand people. The people I specifically refer to spent a long time in the hostel and I spent many hours idly talking to them. As for the typified travellers and workers, they are, I believe, sociologically intelligible and recognizable.

Note-taking

Despite Alfred Gell's injunction, there were many good reasons, practical and psychological, why this thesis would never have been written had I deliberately set out to study the hostel and taken a more open approach to data-gathering.

From a personal viewpoint, it was partly a question of style. I dislike being put on the spot by direct personal questions, as I find them intrusive, and dislike doing so to other people, unless I know them very well. When I want to know something about other people, I usually tell them about myself in the hope that they'll reciprocate: a form of self-consciousness and self-presentation that backfires when what I really want is personal information which the others choose not to give. This was a problem in doing fieldwork, which requires a certain amount of reciprocity and openness. Although I did not conceal what had happened to me in Maré, I had no wish to talk about it. It left me feeling far too self-conscious while at the same time it seemed too complicated to explain.

Yet on the few occasions I did mention it, people were not openly judgmental. Jacqueline, a very likeable round-the-world traveller, to whom I recounted the saga of myself, Catherine and the ethnomusicologist, said that it was obvious that Maré was no place for a single woman (a comment I had heard before), while, as for the Kanaks, everyone knew that the women were marvellous, but that the men were awful. Others suggested that I should concentrate on interviewing Roselène

the cleaner (which would have put me in a very awkward position with both her and Elisabeth).

Nicolas's Kanak girlfriend Mariette suggested that I should stay with her elderly father, whom I had met, at his home in Padua in Maré, where one of Rekab's sisters lived. She became visibly uneasy when I mentioned Rekab and the Cultural Committee but repeated her offer. I vaguely assented but then had misgivings: suppose Rekab, or any other member of the Cultural Committee, disturbed or threatened her father? Although I had given Mariette no definite dates or even time-scale, I did nothing about the offer, having decided I should wait until my relations with the Committee were settled. Later, I was sorry that I had ever agreed to this, for both Mariette and her father were hurt that I had not gone to stay with him, and I am sure that my vague excuses seemed unconvincing. I had found it impossibly complicated to set forth the real reasons, and my genuine fears, in any tactful detail: Mariette was related to Rekab, as nearly everybody was.

One man, a historian but not a practising academic, told me that I was not the first Anglophone who had run into difficulties with a thesis: students, especially females, would arrive from New Zealand and Australia to do research in New Caledonia and would be deliberately given the runaround: officials would either fail to help them or would give them false information, send them down useless trails, and watch while they got into difficulties. Only a very few people, like the famous historian of the sandalwood trade, Dorothy

Shineberg, had managed to overcome such obstacles. As for the Bureau, there was no reason to expect Jemes to help me, because what was in it for him? Except, I thought to myself, that he had wanted people to do research in Maré (perhaps not the sort of research that I was doing), I was connected to the project, and that surely he would decide it was better for him to speak to Rekab than for me to continue pestering him. All I (and surely he) wanted was a quiet tactful solution where everything would sort itself out and we would all be friends again.

But, if I felt reluctant to ask people direct questions and to discuss events in Maré, I was still learning what New Caledonia was like. The endless conversations, the emergence of the same problems over and over again, eventually led me to a solid recognition "that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues - and in terms of the problems of history-making." [C. Wright Mills 1980:248.] Therefore this work is based upon my own daily intensive experience of hostel life.

But there were major obstacles to formally recording the large quantities of data which a planned, deliberate study would have entailed. First, there were the living conditions in the hostel. Although I occasionally managed to get a double room to myself (by paying double the single rate), this was only available at certain times: when the hostel was full, I would have to move into a bunk-room with strangers. There were no tables available, although a plastic chair went with

each bed or bunk. I eventually got myself a picnic table, to type on. But there was no privacy, anywhere, except when I was in a double room, to write or type, or store possessions or get out papers. Everything had to be locked up, to prevent stealing. The hostel was designed for travellers, passing through with a rucksack, not for people with suitcases and bags and boxes of books and papers and portable typewriters. It was therefore very difficult, when living communally, to write extensively and privately on things concerning other people. On a very few occasions, I managed to get a couple of Kanaks I knew to come to the hostel to help me sort out some slides I had taken in Maré: Elisabeth asked me not to do it again. The only people who were welcome in the hostel were those who were actually staying there.

Second, Elisabeth and Francis would never have allowed me to carry out any systematic study. Occasionally, I wondered if I could switch from Maré to the hostel - but studying exactly what I wondered: the vagaries of everyday life seemed to slip through my fingers - and I would gently hint that of course one could always study what was right in front of one. These hints were always received in the most cold and suspicious manner. Both Elisabeth and Francis were already wary of what they perceived as an intellectualism that lacked commonsense and disdained the activities of everyday life, but also of what they perceived to be my set of values, which irritated them intensely. Elisabeth once screamed that I had nothing but books inside my head, "rien que des bouquins dans la tête." One day, Elisabeth said to me

that she could have gone to university had she wanted to, but that she didn't want to (exactly what she meant by this was always unclear, but I felt that she intended me to know that she had chosen what she considered to be the better part).

Elisabeth and Francis's opinion of me improved slightly after the brief unexpected visits of two academics whom I had met in Paris. I hadn't realized their doubts about my story, which I recounted in very few details when I first arrived at the hostel, so as to persuade Francis to take me in: initially he said that I had already spent too long in New Caledonia to be allowed to stay. Now that they believed it, they were, I think, even more suspicious: what on earth could I be doing in the hostel? How was it possible for anyone to get into such a mess and, if I had, why didn't I just go elsewhere? Was I planning something behind their backs? Possibly something to do with the hostel? I am absolutely certain that, had they thought I was, they would have thrown me out immediately: and soon afterwards I would have had to leave New Caledonia, for there was nowhere else to go (for nobody would rent a room to a foreigner and I could not afford a hotel).

The problem was this. In the hostel, it would have been absolutely impossible to carry out any discreet or comprehensive interviewing, questionnaires or discreet surveys. Everyone would have known about them, including Elisabeth and Francis, and, eventually, half of Nouméa. [Nouméa was too small a town to keep anything quiet.] More importantly, Elisabeth and Francis feared that it might

discredit the hostel in some way: the hostel they fought so hard to maintain in the teeth of the municipality, the sniping of local hoteliers and others. They could not have taken the chance of agreeing to an open study of the hostel, particularly as they could not envisage the final product. They would have asked me to leave, and, given the dire state of accommodation in Nouméa and my own straitened finances, leaving the hostel would soon have resulted in my leaving New Caledonia.

An additional complication was that the hostellers, like most Europeans, were quite sophisticated in their self-presentation and in putting forward their best acceptable public face. This was not to say that the Kanaks were not. But most of the hostellers had a more accurate view of what sociologists and anthropologists got up to, and what was likely to be written and perhaps even one day published, or made accessible, in the Bibliothèque Bernheim. Although I very rarely made any reference to any possible future interest in them, I can imagine how most would have reacted. How discreet would I be? How much could they rely on me? They couldn't have known and, as I didn't know what I was going to write, I didn't know either. Very occasionally, I suggested that I might write about them: but how boring, they answered, compared to the Kanaks. I would humbly and truthfully agree. It is only with hindsight that they became interesting. For mine, like each of theirs, is a traveller's tale: as is all anthropology.

Suppose, however, that I had deliberately intended to

write about the hostellers. I argue that there is no other way this data could have been obtained or presented because of the amount of people whom I saw, and the ground this thesis covers. It would have been impossible to deal with them in any way other than anthropological participant-observation (except, perhaps,. through an immense sociological statistical analysis which, even if I had been taking notes non-stop for twenty-four hours a day, would still have been beyond my unaided, pen and paper, capacities).

The majority of hostellers would probably not have co-operated with any survey or lengthy series of questions designed to elicit their social positioning. Not only would they have hated being classified, claiming that they were free spirits, but they would have been sensitive to the implicit insults that many such questions convey. If, as I argued earlier, many people travel so as to escape routinization and the pull of their social fields, they will resist being pinned down once they are abroad. Rather, they would probably claim that they are classless, or that such distinctions no longer matter. This is especially true, as Bourdieu (1984: 354-371) points out, for people, like Arthur and Elfride, who have slipped socially by not achieving quite what was expected of them, or by others, especially those concerned with media, health, and education, who think that they can move upwards by para-competences obtained by colonizing new cultural areas with exotic connotations. Many of the hostel's teachers, nurses and youth workers, such as Cornélie and Bernard, would fall into the latter category. For these people, New Caledonia

offered increased chances of social mobility, "a sort of dream of social flying, a desperate effort to defy the gravity of the social field" (Bourdieu 1984:370).

It might be argued that in relying so heavily on Bourdieu's (1984). Distinction there is a risk of using obsolete data (gathered from 1963-1973). But, while some data relating to taste, education and cultural practices may be outmoded, Bourdieu's general approach and analysis are not. In any case, as stated earlier, the hostellers perceived tastes, activities and social status are used only to establish general differences, and not to create an elaborate general typology. Shields (1991: 32-38) has criticized Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" ("i.e. class habitus, the internalized form of class condition and the conditioning it entails" Bourdieu 1984: 101) as a vague, engulfing "after, so because" circular fallacy in which habitus is invoked as the cause of the very things it explains. Bourdieu's attempts to objectify the mental structures associated with the particularity of a social structure has produced a static, flattened, picture which gives no explanation for change, although the habitus is seen as both durable and malleable: continuing despite constant transformation by experience and consequent expectations.

This cultural conundrum: which came first, the culture or the practice? is familiar to all anthropologists. Sally Falk Moore, in "Epilogue" (1975: 230-236), suggests that the answer may lie in greater formal recognition of the indeterminacy of all social processes and in individuals'

partial use of ideology: this allows change and continuity to be seen in terms of repetition and innovation rather than as oppositions. For the purposes of this thesis, this theoretical difficulty can be ignored. Bourdieu's classificatory correspondences and insights fit with those of other writers on French society. French society retains its courtly and aristocratic ethos in the form of the Parisian "grande bourgeoisie", with its aristocratic and industrial interconnections. It is not difficult to see continuities of practice, taste and culture, despite the events of May 1968 and the greater liberalisation resulting from them. Sherry Roxanne Turkle, in "Symbol and Festival in the French Student Uprising" (1975: 68-98) links the events of May 1968 to a sporadic political theatre of re-enactment, and transformation, of uprisings going back to the French Revolution of 1789: a time of "anti-structure", revolt against authority and expression of social strain that was also seen in the Paris Commune of 1871 and the 1848 Revolution. Like other commentators, including Zeldin, Turkle argues that French society is marked by clearly defined social strata and persistent patterns of bureaucratic control. These social structures, their accompanying behaviours and aesthetic markers, survive over time. They allow what Bourdieu depicts as a stable class-based accumulation of cultural, social, and economic capital, which influenced the hostellers as well as those who had grown up before them.

The hostel was not really a thieves' kitchen, nor the travellers a gang of desperadoes, but beneath the surface

everything I describe went on almost continuously, although the hostel alternated between quiet and noisy periods. Life was tolerable, because Elisabeth's ever-watchful eye ensured that incidents of stealing or anti-social behaviour would be followed by the unexplained departure of one or more individuals: the rowdiness and thefts would then stop, at least for a time. Yet the hostel had a slight air of non-conformity about it.

The hostel was a liminal place, a gateway into New Caledonia: people were not expected to stay there long. Those who did had some kind of problem. While it was true that I was stuck there, there being literally nowhere else for me to go: I was nevertheless learning a great deal. Although, as I said earlier, neither Francis nor Elisabeth would have allowed an open study of the hostel, it gave me a far wider understanding of New Caledonia than I would ever have had from the Kanaks alone. The multiple viewpoints onto New Caledonia, the gradual recognition of the same experiences and comments, repeated over and over again by different people, meant that the hostel gave access to an overview, a panorama, of Caledonian society. It could not be grasped all at once: it had to be looked at slowly: but that was what it was.

15

LEAVING THE HOSTEL

As Elisabeth and Francis frequently said, the hostel was for travellers, not for people unable to find somewhere to live. I was probably its longest-staying tenant. If the hostel had become a "foyer des jeunes travailleurs", it was not a place for the "travailleurs" who had found a permanent job. The high cost of accommodation, however, made it difficult to arrange alternatives.

The cumulative tariff meant that some people left the hostel because they could no longer afford to stay. Others were simply thrown out, or found that they could no longer tolerate the several inconveniences of communal living. Often they kept in touch, if intermittently, with their former acquaintances, although Elisabeth would grimly announce that those who had once left the hostel had no business coming back, for social visits or otherwise. Elisabeth and Francis were generally glad to see the back of people, probably because they had had enough of them at the hostel. Also, they suspected that some of the returners might be taking advantage of the hostel's facilities, using the washing-machines, watching television, etcetera.

Generally, people left only when they had found a job, although several moved into what appeared to be communal squats, and, or, cheap accommodation which varied from centre-town studios, with four people living and sleeping on

the floor of a smallish room, to disused semi-converted warehouses in Ducos, to rotting boats with no electricity or water supply, to "gardiennages" of three months or so in the suburbs, or in the marina [14]. The disadvantage of all these places was that, once one had another residence within Nouméa, one could no longer return to the hostel. So the "gardiennages" were essentially short-term solutions, for those who were planning to leave soon anyway or had other accommodation lined up. Like cheap rented accommodation, the more distant they were from town, the easier they were to obtain - and the more essential it was to have a car or motorbike, not to rely on inadequate public transport.

Although, as a visiting anthropologist said to me, there was nowhere else like it in the whole of New Caledonia, it would be exaggerated to see the hostel as a near-institutionalized transitional zone for youthful deviants. The hostellers formed a marginal group in the life of the town but, despite the comments of Walter, a professional hunter in his twenties, that "People here look normal but they're not", it would be wrong to portray the majority of hostellers as radical outsiders. Travel is such an accepted activity within the youth cultures of Western Europe that the travellers

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14 People with boats in the marina (of whom I met very few) seemed to resemble some of the hostellers, although they generally had more money. Libby Purves describes the international yachting community:

"...an extraordinary assortment of dreamers, obsessives, crashing bores and international bums...once people have taken off round the world, they tend to stop, sometimes for years at a time, and vegetate dreamily in foreign harbours..." ... people tend to know each other by first names only and not to be too curious."...Everyone has had little contretemps with immigration and customs services around the world; and many have good reasons to avoid having a fixed address, either because they hate officialdom or because it hates them." ["Running away to sea with the dreamers" The Times 1 March 1995.]

themselves could not be seen as a deviant group. It was just that individual quirks were highlighted by constant proximity and by the circumstances of people's arrival in New Caledonia. As can be seen by the examples below, appearances and behaviour which would be unremarkable in the cities of metropolitan France might appear odd or unacceptable in a small town like Nouméa.

In town, the hostel had a semi-dubious reputation, being considered acceptable for the short stays of impoverished young backpackers, who could not afford a hotel. [One French visitor to the hostel told me that if I were really á research student, surely I had a grant which could support something better! It couldn't.] In the past, various unhappy incidents had been wrongly attributed to the hostel, after rivals had attempted to set up establishments, legally or otherwise, apparently patterned on Australian backpackers' hostels in Kings Cross. The effects of these lingered on, although to what extent, and with whom, it was hard to tell. People's reactions to the hostel depended very much on whom they had met, what they had heard, and to whom they were speaking.

I, for instance, was rarely treated rudely by shopkeepers or other people, but others occasionally were. One young man from a comfortable bourgeois background, passing through New Caledonia on a round-the-world trip, indignantly told me that he had been thrown out of the American Express travel agency on the grounds that his insistent manner was annoying the staff and that his card was probably stolen. I, who knew the

owner as a kind-hearted middle-aged man, was surprised. I concluded that it was because my informant, to conservative New Caledonian eyes, looked like a hippy. He was just a little too casual and unkempt to pass muster, although his jeans and T-shirt were clean and of good quality and he had an expensive camera. On another occasion, Raymond, the squint-eyed entrepreneur referred to earlier, and I went to Anse Vata. Raymond wanted to see some members of a New Zealand sports team whom he had met on their brief overnight visit to the hostel. As we asked the receptionist at their expensive hotel whether they were still there, I mentioned that we had met them at the hostel. Afterwards, walking back along the sea-front, Raymond told me that I must never, ever, tell people that I was at the hostel because they wouldn't respect me. They would think that I had no money. I indignantly replied that I couldn't care less about the opinion of a hotel receptionist. Raymond, embarrassed, said yes, well, he agreed with me but ... . Money was the most important thing in the world, even if some people claimed it wasn't. I made no reply.

Raymond was right. New Caledonia, Nouméa in particular, was quintessentially petit bourgeois, concerned with making money, "faire du fric". As Xavier, the teacher, told me, after I passed the Chamber of Commerce's interpretation tests, I could pass any examination I liked, I still wouldn't get a job. What they were looking for were business contacts, impeccable presentation, acquaintance with all the best hotels in Nouméa, and a Mercedes Benz to drive clients around in. In New Caledonia, money and monied

appearances were what counted, far less so with the Kanaks than with the French. Kanak society, although using money, still had an underpinning of tribal custom and kin-based rural self-sufficiency, which meant that people could directly exchange food and labour, in cycles of short- or long-term direct or indirect reciprocity. In Nouméa, however, such safety nets did not exist. The main objection to the hostel was that its inhabitants were young and appeared relatively poor. The townspeople saw no perceptible benefit to be gained from cheap-rate, short-stay tourism, and they had had their fill of impoverished young immigrants, competing for jobs with local people.

Any would-be migrant, spending any length of time in New Caledonia, anyone with a job, was expected by the townspeople to find more suitable accommodation and associates. [Although there were a fair number of ex-hostellers in Nouméa, whose reaction to the hostel and its inhabitants depended on their own experiences there.] Hence the importance of the "faux couples" previously referred to, males and females, who shared apartments in the hope that this would give them the appearance of stability and respectability.

PART 4

NOUMÉA

16

THE TOWN OF NOUMÉA

The hostel gave access to a panorama of Caledonian society, or, perhaps more accurately, gave me the time and space to survey a wide range of "typical" events and people, about whom I acquired first and second-hand knowledge. These people were the Métros, the Caldoches, the Kanaks, the Vanuatans, the Polynesians, and the "Chinois". This part of the thesis discusses these people and tries to put them into some sort of historical context. First, in this chapter, I try to paint the backdrop against which these people were displayed and these events occurred.

A stroll around the town

This walk around the Nouméan townscape is a preamble to discussing the social activities of the hostellers, and their relations with others. Pictured in my memory, and in the reader's eye, the Nouméa described here is simultaneously real and imaginary. As Yates points out (1966: xi, 1-3, 21, 22, 32, 36), the art of memory used cities as well as buildings to recall the past. She quotes from Quintilian's De Institutione Oratorio:

"For when we return to a place after a considerable absence, we not merely recognise the place itself, but remember things that we did there, and recall the persons whom we met, and even the unuttered thoughts which passed through our minds when we were there before."

The hostel overlooked part of the harbour, the Cathedral, and the town. To get a really clear view of Nouméa one had to leave the hostel, ascend the narrow lane beside the school, and climb to the top of the slope.

From here one could see almost the whole of the town. To the south, hidden by hills, was Anse Vata, whose long sandy sea-front had formerly hosted the American forces' war-time headquarters and field hospital; buildings now used by ORSTOM [1], the South Pacific Commission, and a small hospital. Anse Vata was now lined with hotels: it was where the tourists went. At its far end were the select residential area of Ouen Toro, near the indifferent beaches and comfortable quarters of the Club Mediterranée, hosting package tours from France, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. To the forefront of Anse Vata, visible from the hostel, were the small suburbs of Motor Pool and Receiving. To the east, invisible, was Magenta, with its aeroport from which one caught connections to the islands and the rest of New Caledonia, its beaches and the Baie Sainte-Marie.

A closer view showed the road curving from the Vallée des Colons, towards the Faubourg Blanchot, home of The English Bookshop and the central barracks, the Caserne Gally-Passebosc. These were named after Lieutenant-Colonel Gally-Passebosc, who swore that he would wipe out the Kanaks as the British had the native Tasmanians (Julian Evans Transit of

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1 Since 1984, ORSTOM (Office de Recherche Scientifique et Technique d'Outre-Mer) is officially known as the Institut Français de Recherche Scientifique pour le Développement en Coopération, but the old acronym continues to be used.

Venus 1992:43). He was killed in the Kanak uprising of 1878. If, having pondered the significance of these names, one turned round, one could look back on the road, which came up from town and then forked. One part descended towards the Vallée du Tir. The other part overlooked the Vallée du Génie.

Walking down, rather than up, the road, one glimpsed a mass of flame-trees rising from a nearby school. When I first came to the hostel, it was possible to take a short-cut through the school-grounds, clambering over the wall into the lane going into the hostel. It was here, in school holidays, that a little group of male hostellers would congregate to smoke cannabis in the day-time. Eventually, to the annoyance of the hostellers, and the relief of the school authorities, a chain-link fence was put up which effectively prevented such comings and goings. Anyone wishing to go into town had to take the road.

Leading off it were two long flights of steps, one into the Vallée du Génie, a small suburban inlet besides the barracks, and another, opposite but further on, into the centre of town. The alternative was to walk downhill, then curve left into side-streets, until one came to Place des Cocotiers.

Place des Cocotiers was a rectangle cut in two by a tarmac strip, its further reaches officially named Square Olry. It sported an old red-roofed octagonal band-stand, a letter-box, a telephone kiosk, a rank of green-and-white taxis, some

benches, the occasional ice-cream van, public toilets in an advanced state of graffiti, and a crowd of tall feathery palms which contrasted pleasantly with the flame-trees, ensuring that, somewhere, it was always shady. Facing the new town hall was a statue of Governor Olry. Jean Olry was a naval captain who was made Governor of the colony of New Caledonia from 1878 to 1880. Beneath his statue, the plinth formerly displayed a bronze plaque showing the aftermath of the 1878 uprising, with the Kanaks bending in submission to the French. [It was removed in the 1970s.]

At the top of the square was the town hall, an imposing mass of concrete; on the right-hand side, going down, was Rue Jean Jaurès, with a hi-fi shop, Caldis, a series of shops selling books, shoes, cameras, jewels, clothes, and bric-a-brac, slightly marred by a fast-food outlet; ending with the the old town hall, closed and empty. Continuing down, across the road, was the great glass tower known as the Aquarium, at the top of which was the Australian Consulate, and Carnaval des Affaires, a haberdasher's with cloth of nearly every kind.

Opposite, on the bottom left-hand side, stood the Brasserie St-Hubert with its blank walls, elevated prices, newsagent round the corner, and nightclub in the basement below. Going up towards the town-hall, along Rue Anatole France, the length of the square was covered by a tacky succession of "Chinois"-owned [2] T-shirt and souvenir shops,

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2 "Chinois" ("Chinese") is a generic term used throughout New Caledonia to describe people of Oriental appearance.

plus a few "snacks" [3]; a chemist on the corner, and, facing it, Prisunic Barrau. This was eventually burnt down in March 1992. Beyond the square, the road led down to Johnston's Supermarket, towards the waterfront.

The fourth side, facing the square, was part of the long continuation of Rue de Sébastopol. This ran from the corner of the Post Office, the PTT, alongside the Bibliothèque Bernheim, past various jewellery, clothes, luggage, and other shops, the hotels Le Paris and La Pérouse, past snack bars, down Place des Cocotiers, to end in front of the Haut Comissariat, commonly known as the Haussariat, at the junction of Rue de la République. It included a photographer's, two cinemas, the Plaza and the Hickson City, The English Language School, and a side-street containing the offices of Air Calédonie, opposite the building housing Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes.

Café Le Pandanus: the ethnographer as "flâneuse"

Facing Place des Cocotiers, on Rue de Sébastopol, was a café called Le Pandanus. From here one was within walking distance of every amenity in town, and could see or locate nearly every significant marker of the Nouméan landscape. What was said of the milk bar in the centre of the ground floor at Prisunic - that if you stayed there long enough you would eventually see every one you had ever known in New Caledonia - was now transferred to Le Pandanus. It was here that I adopted a new rôle - the ethnographer as "flâneuse".

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3 "Snacks" was the common word for "snackbars", or cheap cafés.

Hannah Arendt, in her discussion of Walter Benjamin, ("Introduction" to Benjamin's Illuminations 1973:21,22), says that "like the dandy and the snob, the 'flâneur' had his home in the nineteenth century" but his literary life continued into the twentieth. Charles Baudelaire, Marcel Proust, Eugène Sue, Edgar Allan Poe, and other writers were both detached from, yet incorporated into, the city crowds: the new phenomenon of purposeful bustling mass observed by the leisurely outsider who strolls, shadows, imagines, window-shops, or sits in a café. Rachel Bowlby, in "Walking, Women, and Writing: Virginia Woolf as 'flâneuse' " 1992, shows how a walk through the city, ostensibly to a boot-shop, is a source for reflections and social observation (referring to Virginia Woolf's "Street Haunting" 1930). She quotes Woolf's advice to "loiter at street corners" so as to write "all kinds of books". Arendt argues that the 'flâneur' is the only one who notices the true significance of details: "The true picture of the past flits by." (1973:11). Benjamin elaborates: the 'flâneur' is always an outsider (who is therefore able to observe: 1973:174); and there is no such thing as an irrelevant detail even if we cannot yet (if ever) fully evaluate it (1973:256).

Respectable in literature, the "flâneur" has been less acknowledged in anthropology, despite William Foote Whyte's Street Corner Society 1943 ("I put in a great deal of time simply hanging around with them (the group) and participating in their various activities": Whyte 1943:vii) and a mass of oral evidence. Alfred Gell once told me that "There's a lot of hanging around in fieldwork". I found this to be true.

As I drank a morning or late afternoon coffee, perusing Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes, there passed in front of me, sometimes entering the café, people from the hostel, people on errands, shoppers, Métros, Caldoches, Kanaks, of my acquaintance. Those who came in would sit and chat. Most of my information came from endless conversations over cups of coffee, in Maré, the hostel, Le Pandanus, or elsewhere. These were not seen as work by other people. But they had the great advantage of taking place in a relaxed, gossipy, atmosphere.

Occasionally there were tourists in the café, usually Australian or Japanese: more rarely, Polynesians and Vietnamese, who tended to favour other establishments. When I first came to Nouméa, Le Pandanus was dark and old-fashioned, one of the few places frequented by all races in the centre of town. Then, for months it was closed for refurbishment, eventually transformed by strawberry pink, vanilla white and pistachio green. The sombre leather-like benches were replaced by white chairs and tables. The prices rose slightly but the clientèle remained more or less the same: attracted by its situation, its coffees, light lunches and exotic confections of ice-cream, that came to hold for me the same allure that alcohol, kava, and cannabis had for certain of the hostellers. When, despairing of the future, people like Arthur started drinking to cheer themselves up, my thoughts turned to coffee and, if I could afford it, ice-cream. So Le Pandanus gradually became a habit. At one stage I did a series of calculations - for every half-hour spent spooning ice-

cream in Le Pandanus, I could, like many of the hostellers, have purchased instead at least two litres of the cheapest supermarket wine [4], with which to celebrate Friday night. But Le Pandanus served as a kind of orderly refuge from the to-ings and fro-ings, sometimes frenetic huddle, of the hostel. It was often coupled with visits to the library, the Bibliothèque Bernheim. It became both an inducement to undertake some tedious or disagreeable task, a reward for having completed it, and a place to relax.

From supermarkets to the bus station

Looking out over Place des Cocotiers, one could map the activities of the hostellers, and of the townspeople, by seeing who was walking towards the shops, the banks, the bars, and the bus station. To the left and the right of Place des Cocotiers were the two department stores, Prisunic Barrau and Ballande. Ballande was on Rue de l'Alma, to the right, just behind Rue Jean Jaurès. It was more expensive than Prisunic, but like, Prisunic, had small franchised boutiques within the main store. Both Prisunic and Ballande boasted food-halls and were frequented by one particular, impoverished, hosteller, who claimed that shop-lifting from the rich was no crime. Many of the items could be found in the town's two supermarkets, Johnstons, and another, near the bus station. If one went to Johnston's one would find shoppers of all races, for it was large, clean, and efficient, but without the social cachet of Ballande or Prisunic. Food was cheaper at Johnston's

4 Bread and wine were heavily subsidised, although food prices in New Caledonia were extremely high, both for local produce and for French and other imports.

than at its smaller, shabbier rival, where the clientèle was almost exclusively non-European.

Walking away from Johnstons, at a right angle to Prisunic, one descended towards the bus station, through an area which became progressively more decrepit. Bars, small "Chinois" "snacks," and shops purveyed food, drink, curios, cheap clothes, and a miscellany of household items. The Liberty cinema, which catered mainly for non-Europeans, staged concerts for Kanak and other bands, promoted occasional "spectacles", and generally displayed films of a bloodthirsty and explicit nature that were ignored by the other three.

From the Avenue de la Victoire to the Cross of Lorraine

Arriving at the bus station, one looked across the busy Avenue de la Victoire, up towards the Museum and the Place Yves Tual[5], a thin patch of grass next to the car park. Parallel to the bus station rose the blue roofs of the new market, a linked series of buildings adjoining the waterfront, so that the fishing boats could deliver their catch directly to the fishmongers. To the right was a quay with numerous jetties, tethering a shoal of small boats. This was the marina. It lay

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5 In January 1985, Yves Tual, a Caldoche aged seventeen, was killed by unknown assailants at his parents' home in Bouloupari. He was the nephew by marriage of Roger Galliot, mayor of Thio and committed anti-independentist. Suspicion fell on associates of Eloi Machoro. [Machoro and his associates had "occupied" the town of Thio in November 1995, and had added injury to insult by requisitioning Galliot's fishing-boats.] The event provoked a riot in Nouméa, shortly followed by the death of Eloi Machoro himself, shot by the gendarmerie, near La Foa. [See Isabelle Doisy Chronique des années des cendres 1988:87-91, and others.]

next to the main harbour, in the Baie de la Moselle. The Baie's other boundary was the Avenue James Cook, the causeway joining the former convict settlement of île Nou to the mainland.

On the other side of the Avenue was the Anse du Tir, where the cargo ships came in to dock, bringing goods and collecting nickel and other exports. Behind the docks rose the huge endless pollution of the Doniambo nickel-smelter, its coloured smoke visible both day and night. Tucked behind it, backing on to the sloping heights above which lay the road which ran from the hostel to the botanical gardens, was the Vallée du Tir. Beyond it lay Montravel [6], with the pink towerblocks of the Cité Pierre Lenquette, inhabited almost exclusively by Kanaks.

Standing by the bus station on Avenue de la Victoire, one saw on the right a small cape, Pointe de l'Artillerie, on the other side of which was Baie de l'Orphelinat. The point's slopes were covered with a web of small streets and buildings, a barracks squatting in the middle, the Lyceé La Pérouse nearby. Ascending Avenue de la Victoire, towards the Caserne Gally-Passebosc, home of the Regiment d'Infanterie Marine du

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6 Montravel was named after the naval captain Louis Tardy de Montravel, who in 1854 chose Port-de-France (later Nouméa) as the new capital. He succeeded the Admiral Février-Despointes as Governor in 1854. He confirmed the French annexation of 1853, and enacted the first legal repression of the Kanaks, in his Code de Montravel: code de tranquillité publique (1854) (see Jacqueline Sénès La vie quotidienne en Nouvelle-Calédonie de 1850 à nos jours (1985: 15,16) and Roselène Dousset Colonialisme et contradictions 1970:124).

Pacifique, one arrived at the Place Bir Hakeim [7], which commanded the view to the sea. To one's right was the Quartier Latin. Here were numerous bars, dubious hotels, street-walkers, but also restaurants, shops and the respectable, right-wing, Hotel Caledonia. The Quartier Latin lay almost at the foot of Mont Coffyn, beneath whose heights sheltered the R.F.O. [8]. Mont Coffyn was crowned with a war memorial, which stood out against the skyline, a gigantic Cross of Lorraine.

Cafés, hotels and entertainments

Walking back towards Le Pandanus, down Rue de Sébastopol, one came to the police station, a place which Arthur had visited more than once. This was opposite the Post Office, the PTT. The block next to the PTT was the library, the Bibliothèque Bernheim, an appealing wooden building surrounded by trees and lawns. Almost opposite was the Hotel San Francisco. Next to the hotel entrance was a "Chinois" "snacks", and further up and more respectable, the Café Florès.

The San Francisco "snacks" and the Café Florès were frequently visited by the hostellers (especially those who

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7 The "Bataillon du Pacifique", consisting of Caledonians, Tahitians and other Pacific Islanders fighting for the Free French, participated in June 1942 in the battle of Bir Hakeim. This prevented the Suez Canal from falling under enemy control.

8 R.F.O. ("Radio-television Française d'Outre-Mer") produced a mixture of imported and locally made radio and television programmes. There were also various private radio stations, such as "Radio Djido" (pro-FLNKS), "Radio Rhythme
Bleu" (pro-RPCR), "NRJ 2000" and "Latitude Sud".

found Le Pandanus too prissy), as was the hotel terrace of Le Paris. This, further along Rue de Sébastopol, was adjacent to the Hickson City, where one could drink before and after a film. Le Paris was also popular with soldiers, both professional and conscripts, doing their military service. So, too, was the St-Hubert.

The St-Hubert attracted a wide variety of people, including the hostellers, provided they had money to spend. It operated a dress-code (no flip-flops, "claquettes"), so eliminating a large number of Kanaks. In the evening, small groups of young Kanak men would wander around Place des Cocotiers, gazing up at the covered terrace, strung with coloured light-bulbs, and blaring music. During "les événements", "colons assassins" was scrawled upon the wall of the St-Hubert: replaced by "Eloi assassin", then finally painted out.

Nouméa as a colonial town: social space and social order

Nouméa, as can be seen from this short description, was not an impressive town. Its origins as a trading post, fort, and convict camp (on the île Nou, across the bay) imply little original elegance. Very few of its old wooden houses and buildings remained, except for the old town hall, adjoining Place des Cocotiers and the Bibliothèque Bernheim. Most had been demolished and replaced by concrete boxes, presumably during the prosperity of the nickel boom, during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Its oldest structure was probably the old

wooden bandstand in Place des Cocotiers (which must have been repaired several times) where the convicts used to play in the evenings for the townspeople, and for the Governor and his guests.

Nouméa lacked architectural dignity, despite prettifying its concrete sprawl with plants, grass and sun. It was not Algiers, "Algers la blanche", with white terraces rising from the sea. No Lyautey [9] had cared enough about Nouméa to plan the town with the meticulous attention given to the enlargement of Rabat, Casablanca or any of the other North African cities intended as triumphs of French colonial architecture and modern social theory. No government had thought it worthwhile to spend money on a distant (former) convict colony. Yet Nouméa was still a physical manifestation of French colonial power.

Walking through the town, one was constantly aware of the social reserve between groups, between Kanaks and Caldoches, the ubiquitous presence of young French soldiers. Nearly every corner brought into view some historical evidence of colonialism, from the red-roofed octagonal band-stand to the inscription on the centre of the Cathedral steps:

"Guillaume Douarre (1810-1853) premier évêque de

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9 Louis-Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934), Marshal of France, became first resident-general of Morocco in 1912, when it was established as a French protectorate, so consolidating French colonialism in North Africa. His strategy included town planning and the enlargement of various ancient cities so as to encourage economic prosperity through trade and manufacture. Heavily influenced by the Musée Social theories of urbanism and social economy, he saw town planning as a means of encouraging social and ethnic harmony (for further details, see Paul Rabinow (1989) French Modern, especially Chapters 4, 6, and 9).

Nouvelle-Calédonie, a donné ce pays à Dieu." [10]

Virtually every street bore the name of some French or Caledonian worthy, the names of Governors, Generals, and administrators, or, of battles, victory, or the Republic. The ground opposite the museum juxtaposed two different cultures: the inner space of the building preserved the traditional artefacts of Kanak life, the outer space challenged it with the name of Yves Tual. Visitors of all ages and races could sit comfortably within the museum, or on benches inside the plant-filled atrium, or in the lawn-like court in which a case was built. Outside, on the grassy patch across the road, there was no seating, no shade: only a few Kanaks ever sat there, looking uncomfortable, disconsolately, towards the museum, the bus station, the market and the sea. Many rural Kanaks found Nouméa unwelcoming and even hostile, with its unfamiliar layout, and myriad strangers who made few efforts to be polite. In Maré, Rekab's wife Ket once told to me that she didn't like being in Nouméa, because it was "controllée par les blancs".

Yet despite these representations of French social order, the geography of Nouméa was less white than it first appeared. Casual visitors compared it to the Côte d'Azur. But it was less formal, untidier, more ramshackle, than any French town. Kanaks, as well as Caldoches, played boules in the Place des Cocotiers. Kanaks sat on its shady grass and benches. They

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10 Monseigneur Douarre urged the French government to annex New Caledonia, fearing that otherwise Britain would do so, with consequent Protestantism (Yves Person La Nouvelle Calédonie et l'Europe 1774-1854 1954:127-129).

went to the beach at Magenta, and, more rarely, to the promenade and beaches at Anse Vata, and the beaches at Nouville. [One of Nouville's beaches was more or less topless, frequented by tourists and Europeans: another was favoured by Wallisians and Futunians.]

The apartment blocks of central Nouméa, and its suburbs, held an assortment of ethnic groups, ranging from Europeans to Vietnamese and Indonesians [11], Polynesians and Melanesians. Where people lived depended mainly on what they could afford. Some areas, like Mont Coffyn and Ouen Toro, were mainly white, being the enclaves of the rich. Others, like Montravel, were poorer and blacker. Others, like Vallée du Tir, Ducos, and Rivière Salée, were mixed.

In the sprawling developments of "le grand Nouméa", north towards Koutio, Dumbéa, Paita, east towards Yahoué, south towards Robinson, Mont-Dore, with their endless excavations into the raw hillside earth, bungalows and houses were being built, bought by Kanaks as well as others. [The Kanaks who bought houses in and around Nouméa were an urban élite (most of the ones I met were from Lifou).] Fewer and fewer people remained in the countryside. People went to where the work was, in commerce, tourism and service industries. The result was creeping urbanization. Nouméa was not the cosmopolitan melting-pot beloved of urban anthropologists, such as Ulf Hannerz (e.g. Exploring the City

11 Historically, the Indonesians do not appear to have been confined to any particular area: see Alice G. Dewey, "Ritual as a Mechanism for Urban Adaptation", (1970: 443-444) which describes the Nouméa Javanese as being spread evenly throughout the city.

1980), with the distinctive, colourful, ethnic districts and vibrant interactions described by the Chicago School and its successors. Despite its mixture of races, and official discourses of equality, social interactions were limited. As will be described in more detail later, it was still scarred by "les événements". and had not yet developed belief in an indigenous culture or sense of overall identity. In this, it was like Richard Wilk's description of Belize City before independence ("Learning to be local in Belize" 1995: 112)). Nouméa was still a "white" town, "Nouméa la blanche", with social and residential separations [12], but it was gradually changing.

Nouméa's development depended on its political future and on the emphasis that was beginning to be placed on tourism. The 1988 Matignon Agreement had made provision for a Kanak cultural centre which, after the death of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, crystallized into the Centre Jean-Marie Tjibaou, designed by the architect Renzo Piano, co-architect of the (1971) Pompidou Centre. This stylish and ultra-modern building was not yet built when I was in New Caledonia, but it was designed not only as a showcase for cultural activities but also as one of the most prestigious buildings in the South Pacific, one that would attract tourists as well as Kanaks. Its monumental hives of wood and glass,

The ADCK was closely involved with its construction and plans for its eventual use.

12 I am not suggesting that those Kanaks who bought houses in and around Nouméa were other than an urban élite (most of the ones I met were from Lifou). It is also true that those few Kanaks who strolled along the Anse Vata promenade, and sat on the beaches, were mainly from Lifou. Most Kanaks went to the beach at Magenta, rather than at Anse Vata. [But I think that this may have had almost as much to do with divisions between Kanak groups, attitudes towards bathing, tourists and foreigners, than with social separations between ethnic groups.]

its use of natural materials, and surrounding trees, were graceful allusions to Kanak culture: but it was Kanak culture as seen through the well-meaning eyes of the French. Alceste, who disapproved of the ADCK, as a government organization staffed not only by Kanaks but by Métros and representatives of every ethnic group in the Territory (including, as he said, an African and a couple of "Chinois") grumbled to me about it. The first cyclone that came along, he claimed, would destroy all the glass: all the money being spent on it would be better used on more traditional buildings, and more of them, so that Kanak groups who came to town for training, or performances or other activities, could easily find somewhere to stay and organize themselves.

Alceste was missing the point - the Centre was above all a symbolic gesture, a public acknowledgment that, in New Caledonia, Kanak culture was worthy of being displayed alongside the French.

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TRAVELLERS AND TOURISTS

Tourism was aimed principally towards the expensive Japanese and French metropolitan end of the market. The Japanese often came on package wedding and honeymoon tours to the Club Mediterranée, it being cheaper to get married in a pastiche European ceremony in the romantic South Pacific, and take souvenir presents back home, than to marry in a formal Japanese ceremony, with its accompanying gift-giving and festivities. Australians and New Zealanders came to Nouméa either on one or two days stop-over from cruise-ships touring the Pacific or on Club Mediterranée and other package tours of one to four weeks. The package tours effectively confined them to Anse Vata, and prevented them from seeing anything other than the Isle of Pines and the tourist circuit in and around Nouméa. The half-hearted attempts to develop tourism elsewhere (eg in the Loyalty Islands, and the north-west coast) were aimed at catering to a luxury French and Japanese market that would minimize any contact with Kanaks or other local inhabitants, and persuade people to part with a great deal of money for a few days in a pseudo-European enclave among pleasant scenery. The entire tourist effort, when I was in New Caledonia, appeared directed towards convincing visitors that they were entering a mixed Polynesian-European culture, an imitation Tahiti, descended from France.

"New Caledonia is like nowhere else...It...offers the charm of French civilisation and the feeling of adventure

typical of the South Seas." ["Hello New Caledonia" 1991.]

As several tourist brochures put it, Nouméa is a little piece of France, the Paris of the South Pacific.

New Caledonia's main selling-point was its Frenchness. Without it, it was just another expensive Pacific Island, and tourists might decide that lower prices, better facilities, and equally delightful scenery could be found elsewhere. Despite calling itself the island of light, "l'île de lumière", despite its undeniable charm, often melancholy beauty, and enticing lagoon, it was "vraiment nul", nothing, when compared by an hosteller to the Philippines.

Those looking for French culture were often disappointed. Despite the pleasures of hearing French spoken in the street, the baguettes and croissants sold in the bakeries, and cafés where one could watch the world go by, there was very little to see or do. Several times, tourists stopped me in the Place des Cocotiers, asking in English for the centre of town. Informed that this was it, they gazed incredulously at the surrounding "snacks", the souvenir shops, then the grass with its taxi-rank under the trees, the distant statue, and the deserted band-stand in the middle. Nouméa's sleepy ramshackle charm was not immediately apparent to the casual visitor. It looked too much like other places: it had too much concrete, too few old or imaginative buildings. One of my acquaintances, the proprietor of an English language school, complained bitterly about this: what was really needed, he told me, was cabaret, something similar to the Crazy Horse in

Paris. That was what tourists wanted to see!

Nouméa offered little entertainment to those passing through. Shops shut at lunch-time, Saturday afternoons and Sundays (often when the cruise-ships arrived). Cafés and "snacks" would often close by six or seven in the evening. Cinema films were usually in French. Night-clubs and the Bingo hall did not appear to attract non French-speakers, who presumably spent their evenings drinking and dancing at the Anse Vata hotels, or at the hotel casinos (popular with the Japanese). Shop-keepers grumbled that the Anglophones did not spend enough: given the prices they charged, this was not surprising.

Holidays in New Caledonia could easily cost roughly twice the price of similar holidays in Australia or New Zealand. This was partly because of the cost of living, and partly because of poor facilities. Dornoy (1984:140,141) quotes the Pacific Islands Monthly for March 1969, for complaints from Australian and New Zealand tourists about bad manners, high prices and unhygienic accommodation in New Caledonia. Some twenty years later, the facilities had improved (although definitions of hygiene depend on the observer). The high prices and bad manners remained. [The surly airs of shop-keepers, and others, were sometimes commented on by the hostellers: one café charged me for ice-cubes in a glass of lemonade.] Alceste complained to me that neither the Japanese, nor other tourists from Anse Vata, were interested in Kanak politics or culture. [I tried to explain that

people went on package holidays abroad for relaxation, rather than to acquaint themselves with the political and other problems of foreign countries.]

Tourism had traditionally been used as a back-up to the nickel industry, a second money source in times of slump. Now, with money made available under the 1988 Matignon Agreement, it was being promoted as a promise of future prosperity, an essential part of New Caledonia's economic development.

Unfortunately, it was difficult to see exactly how this would happen. New Caledonia's main tourist markets were France, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. France was far away, while Japanese and Anglophone tourists seemed to come mainly with package tours. Package tours meant that the tourist caused few problems and could be easily controlled. On the other hand, two or three weeks were sufficient to see all that was initially appealing in Nouméa, the Isle of Pines, and other islands. Once having visited New Caledonia, people were unlikely to go back.

Outside Nouméa, tourism was difficult. Public transport and telephone communication were poor. It was not easy to get around without a car. Either one spent a lot of money in the few very expensive hotels in Poindimié, Koné, and elsewhere, or one camped. There were frequent tales of harassment by local Kanaks. The occasional, more moderately priced, gîtes on the mainland and elsewhere were very often

Kanak-owned and run to a standard that no Japanese or even European would willingly accept, regularly provoking press reports on the need for training, and sensitivity to customers' needs. It was not so much that facilities such as beds, washbasins, sanitation and electric lights were missing as that they were rusty, dirty, broken, and not maintained. [A friend of mine went to one where the bed sheets were torn and dirty. He called the "patron", who asked what was wrong with them and said that if his customer didn't like them, he could sleep on the mattress. The " patron" then pulled the sheets off.]

The underlying problem was essentially political. Neither the French, nor the Caldoches, nor the Kanaks, wanted visitors in New Caledonia, except for their money. The French and the Caldoches feared that uncontrolled access to foreigners, especially Anglophones, would encourage the Kanak independence movement. [This I believe to be one of the several reasons why New Caledonia remained outside the EEC, now EU.]

The Kanaks distrusted all white people and discouraged their presence on tribal lands: as in other small, poor, simple communities, they often resented tourists, who antagonized them (Bochner and Furnham 1986:147). The way to deal with tourists (and other white people) was to ignore them as much as possible, while still getting enough money from them to make any unavoidable interactions worthwhile. This was certainly not the attitude of all Kanaks; but it was that of

Rekab, and some other Kanaks whom I came across in Maré, and elsewhere, who had made themselves into tourist intermediaries, for example by running the "snack", opposite Maré's aeroport, built about a year after I arrived.

There was little to show the visitor, despite sporadic attempts by the tourist industry to get young Kanaks to welcome visitors to the Isle of Pines and elsewhere with flower garlands and traditional dances (which being essentially sacred or war-like were not easily amenable to transformation). Visitors to the Isle of Pines (where tourism was well organized) could visit a traditional hut, eat "bougna", the traditional (sacred) dish, made with yams and other ingredients, and drink coconut juice: they could sample flying-foxes, stewed or boiled. There was little else, nothing to take home as tasteful, artistic souvenirs: no strange artefacts, textiles, or crafts.

The outside world could not reach genuine Kanak culture, as lived in Kanak villages, through intermediaries in the tourist industry. Kanak culture was oriented to ceremonial speeches, discreet, lengthy, and often secret, rituals and exchanges, subsistence agriculture, church or other group activities. It was visible but unspectacular (except, perhaps, at festival dances). In other words, it was not easily marketable.

This is not to say that Kanak culture was not being presented to outsiders. It was: but not yet in a fashion aimed

primarily at tourists. The ADCK, whose officials included a number of Europeans and a few Caledonians, were concerned with presenting Kanak culture to the French and to other Caledonians as part of a political struggle towards independence. The Caledonians generally paid little attention to this, insofar that they reckoned that they already knew about Kanak culture, and had their own views on local politics and independence. The French found Kanak culture thin and unappealing in its lack of music and art, difficult to grasp as a complex of beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, many of which differed from current Western secular and sexual mores.

Kanak culture, therefore, was unlikely to attract the docile, well-heeled, appreciative tourists of whom New Caledonia dreamed. If tourists could afford to spend time in New Caledonia, they could afford to go to more spectacular places such as Papua New Guinea, or Vanuatu; or France. New Caledonia offered the worst, rather than the best, of two worlds.

Backpackers

If visitors in general were barely welcome, backpackers, or "ethnic tourists", were less so. Like the impoverished immigrants of the past, they brought an unwanted image of France to New Caledonia, and took an unwanted image of New Caledonia back. In many ways, the backpackers superficially resembled them. Staying at the hostel, young, casually dressed, and controlling their expenditure, the travellers made little impression on the Nouméan townspeople. They were

misidentified, assimilated into what Pierre van den Berghe, in The Quest for the Other (1994), calls poor tourism (1994:154-155). They were frequently anything but poor, enjoying a prolonged slumming around the world, on long, low-budget voyages that still totalled a great deal of money. As van den Berghe points out, "ethnic tourists" usually spend as much money as the other kind - they simply spread their purchases over a longer period, with money which "trickles down" to the less wealthy members of the community. Those "ethnic tourists", travellers, who associated with poor people and Kanaks, were simply reinforcing local opinions of their low social and economic status. In New Caledonia, they were tolerated because there were not enough of them to be an irritant, clogging transport and other facilities designed for local people.

"Ethnic tourists" are often concerned to escape the routinization of ordinary life, by a search for genuine culture, the unwesternized Other. Although this Other existed in New Caledonia, it did not exist in an easily accessible form. It was for this reason that visitors were so often disappointed.

Many backpackers, especially those arriving from Asia, found that New Caledonia lacked excitement. To quote from one Swedish girl's conversation with a fellow-traveller, just before Christmas 1993: "It's so boring and expensive and there's nothing to do. And when you get to the North, it's worse."

I personally had little to do with tourists, particularly those staying in the hostel for less than a week or so, often between flights. Anti-social behaviour, such as noisy drinking sessions favoured by mostly male groups of Swedes and Germans; the incessant stealing by people who would be flying out the next day and decided to empty the communal refrigerator rather than spend any money of their own, or who would "borrow" money, tapes, books, or magazines, without mentioning their imminent departures: all this led to a positive aversion from the residents to short-stay visitors of any kind. To be fair, the stealing came from residents as well as visitors, nor were all the tourists like this. Some, particularly New Zealanders and Australians, would produce their polite, school-textbook French and try their best to fit in with everybody else, rather than expecting everyone to speak English and give way to them. Occasionally, the French would mock them, leaving the Anglophones to retreat into a hurt silence.

Very few of the travellers whom I met had negative views of the Kanaks. The European ones were simply bored and disgruntled - they had expected New Caledonia to be more exotic, more colourful - more like Vanuatu or Papua New Guinea. The few Australian and New Zealander tourists who had come on charter flights, and spent time at the hostel, were generally looking for sun plus exotic French culture, and were disappointed. Often they said that they had no intention of coming back. As one New Zealander said to me: "But there's no real culture here, is there?" (a remark often echoed by French

people): in the sense he meant, there wasn't.

But for those travellers who were interested, and spending some time in the country, as opposed to brief holidays or stop-overs, there were two main approaches. First, the Kanaks were "cool"; second, they were warm and therefore extraordinary.

"Cool" was the word that travellers most frequently used to describe the Kanaks. This often seemed inspired by the reggae music that filled the air of almost every private and public place, and from acquaintances made in the less respectable bars of Nouméa. Coolness was laidbackness, a studied detachment from work and other constraints. Coolness was an unfazed contemplation of the outside world, a mythic nirvana achieved by incuriosity, sex, and dope. That the travellers should project these qualities onto the Kanaks, rather than the kava-drinking Vanuatans, struck me as extraordinary, given my experiences in Gilead. The emphasis on communal life, the constant hard work, the constraints of "la coutume", of religious practice, the authority of the old over the young: all these displayed a tradition, a conformity, a group discipline, that would have been unbearable to most of the travellers whom I encountered. Communes, as Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor point out (Escape Attempts 1992:166-167), succeed only by discipline and work. Where travellers in Nouméa saw "coolness", I saw only bravado, alcoholism, poverty, and unemployment. Where they saw sexual freedom, I saw deracinated young people, fathers who could not support

their children, deserted single mothers, good-time girls abandoned by their soldier and/or other white boyfriends, prostitutes. The rejection of work was there - but it frequently interacted with the white Nouméans' rejection of the Kanaks. The failure to integrate cut both ways. Those young Kanaks who had grown up outside the towns, within their tribes, were left with no new rôles to fill. Either they stayed at home and observed "la coutume": or they came to Nouméa, where the price of success was conformity to white society, competing academically and professionally with more advantaged young people. Disillusionment came swiftly, with the realisation that opportunities were limited, discrimination was rife, that too many people were chasing too few, ill-paid, jobs.

In a sense, I saw too much. The travellers saw only the good-humoured bantering that the Kanak urban young relaxed into when away from the eyes of their more traditional elders, in the company of white transients whose opinions did not matter. The travellers only associated with them during leisure hours, which might or might not include the enforced leisure of unemployment.

This meant that the structure and rigidity of Kanak society was not perceived by the travellers, transients enjoying what Falk Moore and Myerhoff (1975`: 27-30, 53-55) describe as "time out-of-life episodes": who had no need to concern themselves with normal societal imperatives. A corollary of this was that to recognise and enjoy this "anti-

structure", the travellers needed an ideology which enabled them to ignore, manipulate or misinterpret regulation and repetition. They wanted to experience what Victor Turner called "communitas", an idealized and imaginary spontaneity that was somehow free-flowing and out of time.

This "communitas" was usually predicated on shared experiences of alcohol and cannabis, furtive "good times" that will be discussed in more detail later but were mostly male and liable to be disapproved of, if forced upon the attention of Kanak elders.

Some travellers and short-term workers fantasised about the Kanaks, attaching some extraordinary, romantic, qualities to them. If the myth of coolness was generally, but not exclusively, propounded by young males, the belief in warm and wonderful people was generally held by slightly older females. Travelling alone, they tended to trust to the mercies of whatever tribal village they were approaching, to provide guidance or a bed for the night. [Not everyone who did this romanticised his or her encounters.] They would then rave about the hospitality which they had received. [It seemed to me that they had been lucky: those who hadn't, either grumbled or kept quiet.] The two most active exponents of this approach were Perrine, a woman in her forties, who styled herself "the white witch", "la sorcière blanche", and Marie-Claire, a high-school teacher.

Perrine was stopping-over briefly for the New Year

1993, before flying on from New Caledonia to Asia. She was linked with some obscure foundation which had provided her with a grant to make videos of the countries through which she was to travel for the next six months. She intended to use these videos to increase French people's understanding of foreigners. She was reluctant to give me any details, but when I asked why she called herself a white witch, she explained that it was because she was a nurse, and people would doubtless attribute her Western remedies to witchcraft.

Marie-Claire was in her fifties and taught in a lycée in Marseille. An excellent amateur photographer, she had a grant from an anthropological project to make a film about the Kanaks. She came to New Caledonia for three consecutive summers: I knew her during 1991 and 1992, her second and third. She spent some time at the hostel, some time at the Club Mediterranée, and then obtained a "gardiennage" at a house outside Nouméa, for the rest of her stay.

Neither Perrine nor Marie-Claire had any anthropological training, which may have encouraged their enthusiasms and conviction that the Kanaks offered a quality of life not to be found elsewhere. They were, I think, lucky in that they were mature professional women, whose occupations gave immediate authority and status.

Marie-Claire, especially, who was extremely well-travelled, was cavalier towards warnings to observe certain conventions in dealing with the Kanaks: appearing surprised

whenever these were proved true. For instance, she was warned that men and women did not publicly associate, and that therefore it might be difficult to find a male informant. She arranged for a young man to assist her and was flabbergasted when he cancelled the arrangement after a couple of meetings, saying that it would look bad, be "mal vu", were he to continue visiting her. A more serious incident occurred when I went with Marie-Claire to Ouvéa in late August 1992. We stayed in Honorine's house in Fayoué with Tanguy, a fellow-hosteller, and hired a car to explore the island. Marie-Claire insisted on going to Gossanah, scene of the 1988 hostage incident. While Tanguy and I were in the EPK (Ecole Populaire Kanak) shop, Marie-Claire was caught filming the grave of Djubelly Wéa, without permission. A truckload of young men told her that if she did not leave the village immediately, they would burn the car out. She was arguing with a member of the Wéa family when we returned. Although somewhat shaken, Marie-Claire refused to let this incident change her views of the Kanaks, continuing to find everything ridiculous, crazy, constantly exclaiming "mais c'est dingue!", and photographing everything in sight, including cemeteries. The pastor's wife from Fayoué said to me that if Marie-Claire didn't look out, the face of a devil would appear on her developed film, because she was going too near sacred and forbidden areas.

It seemed to me that one of the several possible reasons for this outlook was that New Caledonia was a French colony. Both Perrine and Marie-Claire were implicitly comparing it to

France, as if the Kanaks were the quaint inhabitants of a peculiarly backward and remote French region. Intrusions which would have been made only gingerly into the lives of their compatriots or of non-Francophone foreigners were excused when dealing with the Kanaks.

For example, when I first met Marie-Claire, in the summer of 1991, I had been invited to Kezia's wedding, for which I was to return to Maré. I mentioned this to Marie-Claire, who was eager to accompany me. When I said that I couldn't possibly take her along without first having asked permission from the family, she was astounded. Everyone knew, she said indignantly, that having white guests at a wedding was an honour for the Kanak families involved. Finally, she did not attend the wedding, as I had been unable to contact the necessary people and, in any case, she had to return to France.

For both Marie-Claire and Perrine, the Kanaks were there as a kind of resource, to be emotionally exploited. They were characters in a holiday theme park, which Marie-Claire and Perrine were soon going to leave and in which they wished to spend as little as possible. [Both Marie-Claire and Perrine kept tight control of their money, alternately proclaiming how wonderful the Kanaks were, and bemoaning the amount that they had to spend on presents for them. They resented, I think, that social relations should have a price put on them: one of the attractive illusions of those not experiencing the simple life is that it costs virtually nothing.]

Marie-Claire and Perrine, and those others who proclaimed the Kanaks' extraordinary qualities, were not working with the Kanaks but visiting them. For instance, I was with Marie-Claire when she visited a Kanak woman in a remote smallholding near Canala, whom she had met the previous year. This young woman welcomed us with what appeared to be unfeigned pleasure at having visitors and chatted to us about her family. But her simplicity, generosity, and charm, were things I had come across before, often, but not always, with country people, in New Caledonia and elsewhere. I was surprised by Marie-Claire's constant harping upon it, and her claim that it was unique. I came to the conclusion that Marie-Claire was contrasting everyone she met on her holiday with the behaviour of people at work in the French urban setting of Marseille.

For people like Marie-Claire and Perrine, it was essential to the success of their (usually) self-generated projects (defining travel as a project) that they should have certain experiences and see things in a certain way. Of course, this also applied to long term workers, but, while it is true that nobody can have an undistorted view of others, the romantics' anxiety to believe that Kanaks should be particular sorts of people appeared to be because their projects' success depended on it. [Even if their projects were simply travel, and they were responsible to nobody else, success or failure being entirely in their own minds.] These projects always entailed some sort of risk as they were attempts to escape from the

humdrum, boring reality of everyday life (so making the projecter a more interesting person). These risks always involved varying amounts of time, effort, money, but the real stake was the self and its expectations. Failure was particularly painful because it involved not merely waste but disillusion.

Theoretical Approaches To Tourism

Tourism is a broad area that has been the object of multi-disciplinary approaches with differing aims which range from the economic to the psychological and use different methodologies, sets of data and statistics (see Douglas G. Pearce, "Introduction", 1993:1-2.) Only recently has it been accepted as a theoretical object within sociology and anthropology, and only then after careful definition (see, for example, Marie-Françoise Lanfant, "Methodological and conceptual issues raised by the study of international tourism", 1993: 72). In the sense that tourism involves travelling and sightseeing as a leisure activity, it forms part of the sociology of leisure and is usually looked at in terms of consumption (see, for example, John Urry, Consuming Places, 1995: 129-131; and Graham M. S. Dann, "Limitations in the use of "nationality" and "country of residence" variables", 1993:106). For the purposes of this thesis, I intend to look briefly at some of the economic and socio-psychological aspects of tourism as they affected Nouméa, Maré, the hostellers and the Kanaks.

The Renaissance is often seen as the period of

transformation which separates medieval from modern European history, initiating the development of modern individualism through literature, the arts, and the acquisition of scientific and other knowledge. The expansion of the known geographical world, increased (often violent) contacts with non-Western cultures, and opportunities to travel, can be seen as containing the seeds of contemporary tourism. [I am not arguing that medieval tourism did not exist, simply that pilgrimages and other forms of communal travel were not ostensibly undertaken as pleasurable leisure activities.] For the purposes of this thesis, what is interesting is that both Norbert Elias, in The Civilizing Process (1978-82) and Sigmund Freud, in Civilization and its Discontents (1930), among others, argued that individuals developed increasing self-restraint as life became safer and leisure activities more available, and that there was a flattening of affect in daily existence which was displaced into leisure activities and interests, including interest in the hidden depths of the personality and in the exotic Other (also see Urry 1995:183). Campbell (1987), in his discussion of the origins of romanticism and modern hedonism, shows the ways in which sensibility was displaced onto sublime Nature: a sacralization expressed in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas of the Noble Savage and the corrupting influences of human society.

As Urry (1995: 186, 193-198) has pointed out, romanticism, with its ennobling preferences for solitude and Nature, is a form of class and generational (and, or, of racial/national) politics, when applied to tourist tastes and

activities. Although Urry's main focus is on English romanticism and the Lake District, his words are broadly applicable to Marie-Claire and other travellers in New Caledonia. I have already referred to romanticism, and to the class origins of the travellers: the main difference between Urry's middle-class, middle-aged, romantics and the travellers was that the travellers were younger and less self-sufficient, being on alien and more dangerous territory. Hence they tended to seek out and create social relations with like-minded people and (preferably exotic) Others (often implicitly seen as part of benevolent Nature), rather than content themselves with solitude.

Striking up temporary social and sexual relationships with others, often with people, including manual workers, hotel guides and waiters, with whom one might not normally associate, is seen as essential to enjoying oneself by many tourists and travellers (despite the blasé response of many new "friends", working in the tourist industry: see Chris Ryan, Recreational Tourism, 1991: 30, 35-36). These social and sexual relations often entail risky behaviour (Urry 1995: 183, 188), but they also help to reduce anxiety in unfamiliar surroundings, as do space-colonizing activities such as photography (Urry 1995: 143). For instance, Marie-Claire, with her incessant photography and several cameras, including a video camera, was stopped by a gendarme in Ouvéa who demanded to know if she were a journalist. Like the hostellers, I too struck up temporary friendships, and I too, like Urry's romantics, was impressed by scenery and could

bring to mind suitable literary and historical allusions. However, I like to think that I was reflexive about it. [Urry (1995: 140, 145, 218) argues that modern tourism is concerned with authenticity and nostalgia for a past "wholeness", as Dean MacCannell claims in The Tourist (1976), but also with reflexivity, and the concomitant recognition and enjoyment of the pseudo-scene and pseudo-event (such as theme parks: which people participate in because they want to enjoy themselves, not because they're searching for authenticity: see Ryan (1991: 45)).]

Van den Berghe (1994:8,10) agrees with MacCannell that "ethnic" tourism is a product of twentieth-century modernity:

"Modernity produces homogenization, instability, and inauthenticity, and thus generates in the most modernized among us a quest for the opposite of these things. The tourist searches for authentic encounters with the other. The greater the otherness of the other, the more satisfying the tourist experience ...

The live fringe of ethnic tourism is the outer reach of the second-class bus. Like the advancing line of a savannah fire, it consumes the commodity it searches: the authentic other. ...

In a sense, ethnic tourism represents the last wave of exploitative capitalist expansion into the remotest periphery of the world system ... Fourth World peoples who were first pushed back into regions of refuge - the "native reserves" of the colonized - are now being 'rediscovered' as a tourist

resource. Their prior isolation from the mainstream of their respective dominant societies has transformed them into objects of curiosity and nostalgia for the affluent in search of the exotic. ... Now, even poverty becomes an exploitable commodity if it is colorful (sic) enough. The most inaccessible cultures and peoples are being commoditized."

As a huge, highly organized, international industry, tourism is a means by which the West, rich societies, and dominant fractions of poorer ones, uses an ideology of leisure to exploit and expand into the Rest, taking advantage of poorer societies' demands for economic development (Lanfant 1993: 74-75, 78). The tourist industry is made up of competing near-autonomous elements which make it extremely hard to bring under control (see Richard W. Butler "Pre- and post- impact assessment of tourism development", 1993:141-44). In certain circumstances, where countries are economically dependent on mass tourism, it can be seen as undermining state sovereignty and the ability of particular states to control their natural resources (Lanfant 1993:78-79).

The exploitative nature of mass tourism lies in its power to irrevocably alter the nature of landscape and to adversely affect certain aspects of the societies it penetrates. Although it may bring needed economic benefits, these are often irregularly and unequally distributed (Ryan 1991: 81-83), and may be outweighed by environmental and other lingering costs. For example, resort life-cycle studies show that once an area

is considered to have gone downmarket and lost its original visual appeal, it is extremely hard to revive its fortunes, either by attracting a more upmarket, high-spending clientèle and, or, by redeveloping it (Ryan 1991: 135-136).

It is difficult to persuade people who live in financial poverty but pleasant surroundings that their area should be left undeveloped. People's priorities differ, especially in the values they attach to landscape. Cengeite and other parts of Maré's shoreline were very beautiful, and plans to increase their tourist trade were being put into operation as I left. Maré was on the edge of development: what Ryan (1991:133-137) describes as the exploration and involvement stages of tourism, just about to take off. An elderly Kanak pastor told me how much he looked forward to the eventual setting-up of a fish canning factory on Maré: it would be wonderful, he said, the young people would no longer have to leave the island to find work. I thought that I would prefer the factory to large-scale tourism, for reasons given below.

However hard I tried, I could not see large-scale tourism spreading outside Nouméa and its confines without an increase in ill-feeling and resentment among the local population. Any tourists in New Caledonia were likely to be Japanese or white French metropolitan or English-speaking foreigners, while those serving them were likely to be Kanaks. While the hotels of Anse Vata acted as a protective bubble for the tourist trade, and for the package holiday-makers who came to spend two weeks at Club Mediterranée, New Caledonia as a whole was

not geared to outside influences.

"Les événements" were still too recent, people's identities were still polarised by having been forced to take one side or another, the entire country was too inward-looking to welcome strangers to its shores. Even what appeared to be traditional local colour and therefore appealing to tourists was often nothing of the kind: the wild country to the north-east was deserted and uncultivated because of "les événements" (this will be discussed in more detail later): the pretty Mother Hubbards, "robe de mission", "robe de popinée", usually worn by Kanak women had only become acceptable in town since the 1970s and 1980s, when wearing them had been a pro-independence political statement. [After the Kanaks acceded to citizenship in the 1950s, there was an increasing tendency for Kanaks to wear European clothes.] I remember the shock I received when a man from Maré showed me a (posed) photograph of his mother taken in Canala in the 1950s: this pretty young woman, dressed like a European, her hair styled, looked for all the world as if she had stepped out of a magazine article on 1950s Harlem, or elsewhere in the United States.

The employment of Melanesians would, I think, arouse the same sentiments as those expressed by the Hawaiian delegate to the 1986 Third World People and Tourism Conference: "We don't want tourism. We don't want you. We don't want to be degraded as servants and dancers. That is cultural prostitution ... There are no innocent tourists." (Ryan 1991: 132). I had

already seen the Kanaks' lack of ease at the pseudocultural events of dancing and feasting which were being introduced into the Isle of Pines.

I had heard stories of the bitter resentments, and consequent attacks on Japanese and other tourists, provoked among young Kanak men who saw their sacred sites, with associated myths and legends, enveloped in entertainment facilities for holiday-makers. I was well aware of the complex feelings of resentment and familiarity felt by Kanaks towards white people. Melanesian society operated on an exchange basis; and where, as in New Caledonia, there were Polynesian-style chiefships and associated clan rankings, such ranks were legitimated by mythical origin and not by the outright imposition of one ethnic group upon another. Although it would also allow some economic benefit and individual social mobility, large-scale tourism was a means of turning the Kanaks into a servant class and robbing them of their dignity. This latter was partly because Kanak rural society was not fully integrated into the urban capitalist system and therefore money was not acquiesced to as the ultimate leveller of all relationships and things.

I agree with Jean-Loup Vivier's assertion (Mon chemin avec le FLNKS 1992: 11) that the one thing the Kanaks want is to be accepted as equals: but package tourists, who want European or American standards of comfort and service, (and to be proletarian king or queen for a day: Dann 1993: 105) are not likely to accept them as such. [This may be compounded by

openly racist overtones in the tourists' behaviour towards the Kanaks (Van den Berghe cited in Dann 1993: 103), although I have no evidence of this.] Tourists are intrusive: they take photographs that invade people's privacy and hint at invidious comparisons; once outside the city, they have the city-dweller's tendency to see the land around them as legitimate recreational space, and not as private property to be left alone (see John J. Pigram, "Planning for tourism in rural areas", 1993: 157-158). My own feeling is that this is particularly true when the land appears wild and uncultivated.

My own behaviour in Maré was in some ways tourist-like but not all (although others might disagree). Unlike Catherine, who was so distressed at initially being treated like a tourist, I was treated with a certain familiarity from the beginning. But unlike some of the tourists and travellers among the hostellers, I never thought I was in a repercussion-free zone. I was careful where I went alone, in Maré and elsewhere, despite a longing to explore. Perhaps I was too cautious, but given the fierce disputes that centred on land use and ownership, and the comments I later heard about people wandering over others' land, I avoided one more possible source of offence. Although my initial visit to Maré was without a camera, later on my taking of photographs was not always well received, although I gave people copies of them and they resignedly concluded that they were for "souvenirs"; regarding them, I am sure, as intrusive and a costly waste of time. I inwardly graced them with the name of field-notes, for people seemed less offended by my photographing a scene or

object than by my openly writing any notes on it. [Urry (1995: 191) lists the anthropologist's form of visual consumption, the tourist gaze, with that of the romantic in its solitary sustained immersion in its surroundings: but unlike the vision, awe, aura, of the romantic's gaze, the anthropologist's, consists of scanning and active interpretation.]

18

ON THE TOWN: SOCIAL ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE HOSTEL AND THE RECREATIONAL USE OF DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

The Kava Bars

A certain amount of solidarity and social life continued between the hostellers and the ex-hostellers, although those who had left the hostel gradually drifted away and formed their own social networks outside. People still bumped into each other in town, in shops, cinemas, cafés, and the Bibliothèque Bernheim. They also met in bars, including kava bars.

Kava was, for most travellers, an exotic drink which they tried in much the same spirit as they might have tried cannabis. On one occasion, I heard a hosteller say that the authorities were happy to let Europeans go to kava bars, as it kept them out of trouble, as they were the same people who would otherwise smoke grass, "fumer l'herbe". For the travellers, therefore, kava bars were part of a counter-culture. For the Pacific islanders who used them, kava drinking was a normal practice, with none of the rebellious connotations which the travellers and others attributed to it. For the hostellers, those travellers who had stayed long enough to become residents, the kava bars were an introduction to Nouméa's ethnic and social diversity. They offered easy encounters with Polynesians and Vanuatans, and, very occasionally, Métros, Caldoches, and Kanaks.

There were several kava bars in Nouméa and its outskirts, although I only ever frequented one and that for less than six months. However, shortly before I left, I visited another, with some Kanaks, built on a patch of waste ground near where a great pink granite statue of the Virgin of Fatima overlooked one of the blackest traffic spots in New Caledonia. Here, I encountered yet another of the ubiquitous ex-hostellers: from his comments, and those of others, I am sure that my experience of the kava bars was fairly typical.

The bars were mainly run by Vanuatans, who had arrived in New Caledonia after the Santo rebellion of 1980. They catered largely for their male compatriots, although women, and those of other nationalities, also attended. Those Europeans who frequented them tended to be youngish outsiders. The kava bar which I visited intermittently, from mid-1991 on, was sometimes patronized by members of the hostel and lay at the bottom of a parking lot on Avenue de Maréchal Foch, the street running below and parallel to rue de Sebastopol.

The kava bar opened from about five to nine-thirty in the evening, and consisted of a large rough shack of wood and corrugated iron. It had a protruding shelter where some ancient benches and armchairs, with burst padding and minus legs, allowed one to sit in the open air. The kava was drunk standing, one's back to the participants, on the ground outside. It was said to me that this was in case any one should vomit,

or overturn the cup, as the initial taste of kava affected people in different ways. Behind the shelter was a tiny kiosk. On the wall was a hand-lettered sign saying Nakamal [1] and, later on, a poster proclaiming an exhibition of the work of Joseph John [2]. In here the kava was served, from polished coconut husk cups dipped into a large plastic barrel. The kava was made from water poured on roots, which, I was proudly assured,were no longer masticated but shredded in a machine [3].

The archaic simplicity of the kava bar, hushed, with little light, left a profound impression upon me. The inner room was illuminated by a bulb slung with kava root and shaded with red paper. The walls were lined with benches. In the centre of the earth floor was a small fire, bits of old planks stinking with glue. Occasionally a fire would be lit outside. The customers were Vanuatans and a few others, semi-hippy Métros, a rare Caldoche, sometimes a Kanak. Both men and women came. There was a general silence. People spoke softly, gazing into the flames. Tranquil, with legs like lead, and, occasionally, as they rose, "la tête qui tourne", they relaxed. Strangers whispered to one another: they were all

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1 "Nakamal" is a Bislama word meaning traditional men's house; traditional kava drinking-grounds; a kava bar in an urban centre (Ron Brunton The Abandoned Narcotic 1989: 204-5).

2 Joseph John is an artist whose work is associated with Vanuatu, including Espiritu Santo.

3 A doctor had warned me that Hepatitis B could be spread through the saliva on chewed kava. The machine was probably a meat-mincer (see further details below).

from Vanuatu, one woman told me, the customers, and her family who owned the bar. They had left everything behind in Espiritu Santo and come to Nouméa to live. But sometimes they returned home.

Brunton (1989:100,104,107,110-112.), in his discussion of Vanuatan kava use, points out that the emphasis on quietness means that it is essentially an asocial drug, although taken in groups. "The effect of drinking 15 grams of (kava) rootstock in a half pint of water is to pleasantly paralyze, at the cord level, sensory transmission, then the innervation of striated musculature. A euphoric state develops during which the mind remains clear; the drinker is tranquil and friendly, and refuses to be annoyed; and finally, if the dose is strong enough, sleep ensues." [Tabrah and Eveleth (1966), quoted in Mac Marshall, 1987, "An Overview of Drugs".]

The Nouméan Nakamals appeared to resemble the secular Port Vila bars, where both men and women drink (women from the northern islands take kava with the men). They seemed to have common elements with the Tannese traditional sunset kava rituals, where men explicitly say that by drinking kava they have "farewelled" one another: rituals which presumably at least partly resemble the Espiritu Santo ones.

For example, in Tanna, the kava root cannot be washed but is dried by hanging over a fire. In traditional rituals, kava is usually drunk on an empty stomach, which facilitates absorption. Food is eaten afterwards. Men go to the margins

of the drinking-ground (a cleared area) to drink, or turn their backs, or go into a corner to drink. Tannese men, drinking in the Port Vila kava bars, where women were present, would move to a part of the Nakamal where they could not be seen drinking (as did some men in the bars I visited). In the Port Vila bars, kava is ground-up in a meat mincer (perhaps because both men and women were present and might feel shame if they saw the kava being chewed). [According to Tannese (and other?) myth, kava originated from a female vagina, hence women were excluded from kava-drinking. On Espiritu Santo, kava appears to have been traditionally both chewed and grated (according to area): on Aoba and Maewo (both in the NaGriamel movement) it was grated with a piece of coral.]

The physical effects of kava differed. Kava from Vanuatu was agreed to be the strongest in the world. In some drinkers it appeared to stimulate hunger or a thirst for beer- in others sleepiness. Some had stomach pains and diarrhoea. Some people took vast quantities of it, six or seven cups every night, and progressed to to other kava bars, at Ducos, Motor Pool, elsewhere. I, as did others, drank it from time to time, less for its noticeable effects than for the ambiance of the bar and the encounters with the Vanuatans and other customers. The emancipated Wedumel girls, related to the Mayor of Lifou, also went there. It was a place where a woman could go on her own, as I sometimes did, although I preferred to go with other people such as Celeste or other of the hostellers.

But it was not to last. In early 1992 the bar was taken over by a Tongan and the atmosphere changed. The Tongan had a fleshy handsome face and an enormous mane of lightish brown hair with yellowed streaks. I later discovered that he spoke some English, was widely travelled in the Pacific, and claimed connections with island royalty.

I visited the bar in May 1992. The shack had been tidied up, the decaying armchairs removed and the shelter transformed. Like a self-parodying showman in a tourist brochure, the Tongan sat naked to the waist, hair flowing over his back, theatrically dishing out kava powder, mixed with water [4], at inflated prices in front of a backdrop of (fake?) tapas. His white helpers, who formerly included Arthur (so Arthur told me), rinsed the cups like acolytes against the noise of the background. The old clientèle had vanished. The Vanuatans had been replaced by the would-be hippies of Nouméa, the kids who were looking for kicks.

I returned there once, late in the evening after the ending of the 1993 music festival in Place des Cocotiers, with a group of hostellers. A brown-skinned boy, who looked about fifteen, struck up conversation, asking whether I had ever drunk meths, "le vin bleu" [5], then assured me that there was

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4 "Kavatonga" is made by mixing kava root powder with water (Arne Aleksej Perminow The Long Way Home 1993:46-47). Kava powder was purchasable in Nouméa.

5 Drinking methylated spirits was a serious social problem in Nouméa and Ouvéa, and, probably, in other parts of New Caledonia.

nothing like it for giving you a good start in the morning. [I later discussed this with a couple of nurses from the hostel, Diane and Julie. They assured me that he could not possibly have tried it, its after-effects being such as to invalidate his statement.] A few months later, the bar was no longer there. The parking lot was barred at the gates, the shack at the rear left darkly empty and untenanted.

Kava, piper methysticum, occasionally grows wild in New Caledonia, including Maré, but is not drunk or used in any other way that I know of. Why this should be is not known. It may be that it was never used or that it was used but that the custom fell into disuse and never revived. In Vanuatu, New Caledonia's nearest neighbour, the traditional Tannese kava ritual was a means of maintaining social harmony by contact with the supernatural, because of kava's mythical links to the spirit world, to marriage exchange and procreation. In Fiji (see Christina Toren 1994 "The Drinker as Chief or Rebel: Kava and Alcohol in Fiji"), kava, "yaqona", serves much the same purpose of tradition and putting oneself in touch with the power of the ancestors. There is an increased emphasis on gender and hierarchy as aspects of socialization, expressed in seating arrangements and serving rituals. As in the Nouméan kava bars, Fijian young men like to "wash-down" kava with beer: unlike the Nakamal, but like its Tongan successor, Fijian kava-drinking begins in a lively atmosphere.

New Caledonia, however, lacks the kava/alcohol oppositions found in Fiji, Tonga and, presumably, Vanuatu and

other Pacific islands. The few Kanaks who drank kava had been introduced to the practice by outsiders. Drinking kava, therefore, even in the less traditional surroundings of Nouméa, was a routine activity for Pacific islanders which must also have been a sign of identity and carried memories of home. It was a respectable activity, with none of the cross-cultural connotations of youthful rebellion associated with taking cannabis or alcohol. Kava-drinking, therefore, said little about the hostellers' relationships with others, except that it was one more exotic experience to discuss and enjoy. Cannabis and alcohol, however, were among the primary means by which young male Europeans struck up acquaintance with other Pacific peoples. It was as if alcohol, and the sporadic smoking of cannabis, were initiation rites to see if they shared the same idea of an illicit good time.

Cannabis

The travellers' attitudes towards the Kanaks were sometimes reminiscent of those described by Rian Malan, in My Traitor's Heart (1990), a paperback copy of which appeared in the hostel in early 1992. [It eventually disappeared, having been sold to The English Bookshop by Joe, an itinerant English hippy. I also discovered that he had also sold all the back copies of Time magazine, which I had donated to the refectory reading pile. His injured response to my strictures was that it wasn't stealing if nobody wanted it.]

Malan (1990: 41):

"I was thirty before I discovered that many Africans

thought dope-smokers were losers and fuck-ups. In my teens, everyone knew that all "Afs" smoked dope. That was why they were so wise. They sat up there in the hills, you know, smoking zol, watching the sun rise and set, just being cool and in touch with nature and all that ... Once, ... some friends and I had a passing encounter with such a wise one - an old, yellow-eyed "kehla" who sold us some "zol" and invited us to sit down for a smoke outside his hut. it was a moment of profound, almost religious significance. ... And there we sat, zonked, the white sons of personnel managers, art dealers, and brain surgeons, utterly oblivious to the squalor and misery around us, rocking back and forth on our haunches and thinking, Ah, so this is what it's really like to be one of them; pretty cool. We couldn't talk to the old one, of course, because we learned useless languages at school, like German, or dead ones, like Latin. Instead, we communed silently. ... This was a symbolic encounter anyway."

I witnessed an attempt to put this philosophy into practice at a grand and expensive wedding I attended in Lifou, in 1992, with Robert. Robert was an oceanographer turned traveller who was also a resident hosteller, and a friend of Triji, who had invited us. It was evening and the festivities (including heavy drinking, led by one of the island's high chiefs) were well under way. Robert disappeared, then reappeared, looking cross, and complaining that he had tried to join a group of young Kanak men, smoking cannabis in the bushes. They had told him to get lost and accused him of being

a government spy. Robert, who upon arrival in Lifou had metamorphosed into a white "Rasta", was not just annoyed, but hurt. Eustache, a worker and ex-hosteller present at the wedding, heard about this, telling me that Robert had let the side down. He emphasised that he, Eustache, as a European and a youth worker, had a proper sense of his position, and would never do such a thing.

Cannabis was illegal but widely available in New Caledonia, being grown on the mainland and on all the islands. It was said to be sometimes smuggled from the islands in crabshells. Ouvéa appeared to be the main area of production, supplying cannabis to visiting yachts. Since the hostage-taking crisis of 1988, French control over Ouvéa had largely broken down. The traditional chiefships, the churches and the gendarmes, had lost the respect of a large number of young men who did, collectively, more or less as they pleased. These young men tended to wear clothes in " Rasta" colours of black, yellow, green, and red, sometimes printed with cannabis leaves, have hairstyles with dreadlocks, and play reggae music. [This was not confined to Ouvéa, but the coming together of all these "Rasta" symbols in any one individual was usually seen as his or her public statement of social and political revolt. This did not necessarily represent a real social threat. The Kanaks assumed that young men would sow their wild oats: an almost inevitable stage in the internalization of traditional values.]

These young Ouvéans were associated with the open

smoking of cannabis, disrespect towards their elders, and frequent attacks upon visiting tourists and the island's few non-Kanak residents, including stoning and car- and hut-burning. Although officially deplored, they were acting as the traditional warrior age-set, expressing the islanders' deep resentment at the deaths of nineteen of their young men. The Kanak interpretation was that the nineteen had been wantonly killed, their bodies contemptuously treated like those of animals, while Kanak elders had been grossly insulted and their customary attempts to mediate ignored. Any European visitor had to be prepared for hostility. The heavily-armed gendarmes did not normally intervene, such was the risk of provoking further trouble. They might occasionally speak to the chief, or high chief, of the tribe or district that the suspected trouble-makers came from.

Cannabis had only appeared in New Caledonia since the 1970s, but its use had spread after it became associated with Rastafarianism, adopted during "les événements" by young Kanaks as a sign of political, pro-independentist, revolt. [Alceste, from Maré, told me that the use of cannabis on Ouvéa had less to do with politics than with the islanders themselves: Ouvéans, he said, had always been notorious drunkards, given to methylated spirits whenever other alcohol was not available.]

Cannabis, like alcohol, was disapproved of by the evangelical and Catholic churches, for health and other reasons. They campaigned vigorously against it, aided by

various efforts to promote public health, run by the local administration. Often they would recruit speakers who were reformed smokers (and, or, drinkers). An information display on drug abuse was organized by one of the evangelical churches and held at Place des Cocotiers in October 1992. It included a poster commemorating the tenth anniversary of the death of Bob Marley, photographed smoking a joint. Underneath the joint, someone had added "Cannabis kills", "le cannabis tue". The display was widely criticized (by the Métros) for combining religious evangelization with misinformation, particularly by associating the smoking of cannabis with the spread of AIDS.

Alcohol

Alcoholism was the major social problem among young Kanaks in Nouméa, and, to a lesser extent, within tribes. Those tribes, such as Gileadain Maré, where I was, which succeeded in enforcing an outright ban on the public consumption of alcohol were very few.

Alcohol caused serious difficulties throughout New Caledonia, although these were largely confined to Kanaks and Pacific islanders. [Misuse of drugs other than cannabis and alcohol was minimal, although glue and other solvent sniffing was sometimes practised by school-children. I heard about a leaf sometimes chewed by young men in Lifou: it produced distorted vision, and fits of giggles in its consumers.] Shops in Nouméa were forbidden to sell alcohol at the weekend, which may possibly have reduced the amount of drunkenness

displayed in the centre of town.

Although Arthur and a number of other male (never female) hostellers went on weekend drinking binges, these were outside the hostel (although Arthur was occasionally found outside, collapsed in the gutter). People resident in the hostel, if they drank publicly, drank wine or beer, usually with meals and maintaining a polite affability. There were exceptions to this, when people gave parties: there were very few of these, as Elisabeth generally forbade them, citing previous celebratory occasions ruined by people who became deliberately, visibly, drunk and behaved disgracefully. It was young men, not young women, who went in for heavy drinking, although I once saw a young woman scratch another one's face, because the victim had left the front door open, after she had been drinking for much of the afternoon. Any hosteller who caused trouble was immediately thrown out.

There was little public disorder associated with Métro or Caldoche consumption of alcohol. Nearly every crime committed by a Kanak or Pacific islander, as reported in Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes, was attributed to the influence of drink. [Maryon McDonald, in her "Introduction" to Gender, Drink and Drugs (1994:4), claims that the visible consumption of alcohol is perceived as a threat when the consumers come from groups other than the established social majority. Downes and Rock (1988: 150) point out that the state creates deviant groups by criminalizing morally disturbing activites, such as public drunkenness, when carried out by subordinate

groups.

The Kanaks' widespread use of alcohol originated with its general availability after the Second World War, when the Kanaks acceded to citizenship, and increased in the 1970s, when they acquired more spending money. Kanak drinking, in certain circumstances, is a form of self-assertion, a display of wealth and a visible means of telling white people that they are legal citizens and as good as they are. On other (rare) social occasions, hosted by or including several whites, people are usually careful to control their behaviour so as to observe European proprieties.

An association for the prevention of the abuse of alcohol, "Association pour la prevention des abus de l'alcool", connected with the Evangelical Church, produced a popular song entitled "Demain sans alcool", (1992), which was widely played on the radio. Dwelling on death, car accidents, and the staining of pavements, it proclaimed that drink turned men into satyrs and their families into martyrs:

"Quand l'homme sage redevient satyre
La famille, elle, redevient martyre."

It called on all mothers and women to unite against the evil of uncontrolled drinking.

This song implies that, as in France, particularly rural Brittany (McDonald 1994:111,119) and Fiji (Toren 1994:156-158), women are presumed not to drink, as they are responsible for maintaining the social order and policing the

behaviour of others, especially men. As elsewhere in the Pacific, men's sexual urges are thought to become uncontrollable under the influence of drink: hence men know that drinking will give them the excuse to make sexual advances, or to carry out assaults. Drinking, then, is sometimes a preliminary to carrying out a range of behaviours which would would otherwise be seen as totally unacceptable. The offender takes the blame for drinking, rather than for the offence itself.

My personal inclination, heeding dire warnings from others, and Tenane's public ban on alcohol, meant that my own experience of Kanak drinkers was limited. I had seen men in Nouméa use social occasions to turn up drunk and then insult their affines, so spoiling the festivities while safely expressing family rivalries and resentments. I had also made two trips to Lifou where there was no ban on alcohol and had twice witnessed sustained public drinking.

The first had been at an informal clandestine dance of young people, in an old beachside warehouse on the outskirts of the village where I was staying; it was explained to me that the chief had forbidden it but that they were going to hold it anyway. Here all the young men got drunk and danced with the young women: but with a cheerful good-humoured inebriation that led to none of the wild behaviour I half expected (despite a dramatic climax when one young man burst into the warehouse waving a shotgun and all the women hid outside in the bushes (cf. Toren (1994:161-163) on Fijian unofficial

"rubbish-hall" village dances).

On the second occasion, at the wedding, I stood in the shadows and shared small nips of spirit with young women. But this seemingly girlish naughtiness was carefully controlled. I saw sexual and general aggression become increasingly visible in adult men, with drunk young boys moving unsteadily in the shadows, grasping triangular dagger-like knives. I kept with the women within pools of light and within sight of the elders, and feigned sleep when fearing that the chief's insistence would force me to drink. This was less a cheerful festive drinking than some kind of inversion of what I felt to be normal (Maréan) sober Kanak behaviour. The drinking was led by the high chief, who, perceptibly under the influence, would call out "Il faut boire!" whereupon all those surrounding him, men and women, would do so. People were drinking for the sake of it. It was a regulated excess, a display of wealth and power, of conspicuous consumption.

The overall drinking pattern was clear enough. Whatever the occasion, whether in Maré, Lifou, Nouméa, or elsewhere, it was important, in drinking, to finish what one had started: for instance, those drinking from a bottle of whisky had to finish the bottle. There was no question of putting away an opened bottle. Drinking by women was a sign of possible sexual availability, and drinking by men an excuse for rape. Hence women did not remain with men while they drank (the dance and the wedding were exceptions, not everyday life: and even on these occasions the sexes were largely segregated, and

divided by age-sets). Smoking cigarettes (tobacco, but especially cannabis) by young girls and women was also morally suspect, particularly if carried out in a mixed male and female group. [Cigarettes and tobacco were very common "custom" offerings, to and between men.]

For that reason, in the Si Guahma district of Maré, where I was, female consumption of ordinary cigarettes, but, far worse, of cannabis and alcohol, was severely frowned upon. [Older married women might smoke cigarettes without incurring censure: perhaps because they were assumed to be past child-bearing, so effectively safe from any possible contamination from male, outside, non-Kanak substances. This assumes that alcohol, cannabis and tobacco are all pollutants but that cigarettes are less so (cf. Toren (1994:168) on the pollutant power of alcohol). As in Fiji, a blind eye was turned to the activities of young men, provided that any drinking and smoking was done in private or outside the village. Chiefs and other adult, married, men, were also known to drink in the privacy of their own homes. This was generally ignored, as adult men were responsible for maintaining traditional values, including edicts against drinking. Alceste, as part of a diatribe against the high-handed behaviour of the high chief Naisseline, told me with fury how in Naisseline's village of Neçe a militia, "milice", of young men were entering people's homes and searching them for alcohol. A truckload of "milice" were pointed out to me soon after I first arrived in Maré. Naisseline's action was presumably to publicly enforce his authority and to privilege his own private

consumption of alcohol.

Vivier (1992:12) says that white (male) participation in Kanak drinking sessions is welcomed as a sign of brotherhood: "La participation à des beuveries est appreciée au plus haut point comme gage de fraternité." Despite the frequent assertion that the Kanaks were cool, alcohol and coolness did not usually go together except in that mellow state achieved by those who had not yet drunk too much. I heard several stories involving hostellers and other Métros, in which such drinking had unexpectedly ended in unpleasantness or violence. This was frequent, but not inevitable. The question is, why should this be so?

Marilyn Strathern, in "Relations Without Substance" (1987:231-245), referring to Bruce Larson's "Marijuana in Truk" (1987), argues that Pacific islanders often believe that things should be done to their fullest extent, for example eating or drinking. I think that this is correct. Pacific islanders use alcohol and drugs as a means of temporarily altering the nature of their sociability, of expanding their range of social interaction, without fundamentally changing the nature of their social identities. This makes drugs into consumables, whose effects are immediate and wear off with no evident long-term consequences. Whereas food sharing over time slowly and indirectly alters the nature of social relationships (as it does with the Kanaks), by altering body substances, drugs do not.

I argue that sharing cannabis and alcohol with young whites allows young Kanaks to reinforce their sense of age-set male identity, while temporarily extending their social range. This chemically-induced sociability can allow for the exchange of thoughts and feelings without any consequent entrapment in problematic social relationships. Travellers who participated in such sharing were doing much the same thing: they would soon be moving on, and were enjoying what was essentially a transient('s) pleasure.

Alcohol, like other substances, allows people who would otherwise control themselves to attribute otherwise bizarre and unacceptable behaviour to the influence of drink. As such, it is an inducement to expressions of hostility as well as friendship. As in Fiji (Toren 1994:161), it allows young men to display bravado. Philippe, a hosteller who went to stay with some Kanaks in both the Isle of Pines and Ouvéa, told me that he knew that if he had spent more time there he would have had to fight some of the young men in order to be socially accepted.

Alcohol is also an opportunity for sexual speech and behaviour, a refuge against shyness and other difficult emotions, such as embarrassment and shame. [This is confirmed for New Caledonia by Tjibaou, in Jacques Violettes ("Le Message de Jean-Marie Tjibaou" (1989:14-26) and Dubois (1984:188-189), for Maré; Robert I. Levy (Tahitians 1973: 413-426) says the same for Tahiti.] Drinking allows people to verbalize and enact feelings which are normally hidden. In New Caledonia, these

feelings among and towards different ethnic groups frequently include complex mixtures of shame, bitterness, hostility, and friendship. Any subsequent awkwardness can be blamed on the effects of drink, rather than on the person(s) concerned.

What is interesting here is that even though cannabis and alcohol share much the same function of temporarily extending sociability, despite their differing physiological effects and user contexts, they have different historical and political backgrounds.

Cannabis arrived in the 1970s, and was associated, among other things, with the independence movement, as were anti-alcohol campaigns. Jean-Marie Tjibaou, when a Catholic priest at Nouméa's cathedral, had been associated with the anti-alcohol campaign "The Feminine Movement for a Smiling Melanesian Village", "Mouvement Féminin vers un Souriant Village Mélanésien", started by Scholastique Pidjot, wife of the Kanak politican Roch Pidjot. Like other Kanak women's groups, this gradually became connected with the independence movement. This was partly due to the pro-independence stance of the evangelical churches. [This is not to say that the Catholics did not support campaigns against alcohol: simply that they lacked the fervour of the evangelicals.]

Alcohol has a different history. The blackbirders, sandalwood traders, soldiers, convicts with whom most of the Kanaks first made contact must surely have introduced them to an unconstrained, visibly uninhibited consumption of

alcohol, which set the cultural pattern for the kind of despairing disease-nurturing drinking which led to the "fatal impact" interpretation of Pacific depopulation in the 19th and early 20th centuries (cf. McDonald (1994:14) on the Amerindians cultural use of "firewater", learnt from white traders and trappers and then later deplored as indigenous disintegration by educated white visitors). The missionaries, especially the Protestant ones, denounced alcohol and used their influence to help ban it. Once it became easily available, its ritualization by young men, in temperance villages such as Tenane, posed no real threat to social stability, despite dire warnings from the elders (cf. Fiji: Toren 1994:165; Erikson argues that the volume of deviancy relates to the community's capacity to handle it: tolerance towards the young is finely tuned to curb those who go too far and upset the social order: cited in Downes and Rock (1988: 102-103)).

In Lifou, however, it seemed to me that alcohol was more of an outlet for, and contribution to, social tension. Car accidents and violence were constantly blamed on alcohol; there were also long-running feuds between factions and chiefships that occasionally spilt into car and hut burnings and other aspects of large-scale civil disorder. At the same time social pressures were growing rapidly. More and more whites were living on the island as administrative and other personnel, and tourism was being promoted by every means possible. People from Lifou were traditionally seen as clever, easily adapting to white society, and resented by other Kanaks. As Alceste from Maré told me, the Lifouans were like the

Tahitians "Ce sont les chiens des blancs". There was an emphasis on modernization. A lot of people were making money, some of whom were not even from the island. Others were being left in poverty to witness the exploitation of what they considered their ancestral lands. Whites, including female tourists who went topless on the beach, were felt to be disrespectful of Lifou's land and customs.

The seeming contradiction of pro-cannabis, anti-alcohol, independentists was really a generation gap: older people, nearly all church-goers, were opposed to cannabis and alcohol, while those younger ones who were less traditional, and socially rebellious, were in favour of both. [This is partly to do with the greater influence of French youth culture over the more urbanized, better educated, young people.] Hence some young Kanaks, mainly young men, were willing to drink and smoke with the travellers. Despite any unvoiced individual political differences, both groups were participating in what they saw as a youthful act of revolt against their elders, a cross-cultural assertion of strength and independence.

For the Kanaks, this had a different significance than for the travellers. First, divisions of "les jeunes" and "les vieux" were complementary rather than oppositional. "Les jeunes" saw themselves as primarily Kanak, rather than young. The travellers were tolerated because they were transients who did not interfere with everyday living. While not wishing to exaggerate the cosmopolitanism of the (largely French) travellers, their social boundaries were more diffuse: partly

because, in their dealings with the Kanaks, they tended to act primarily as individuals or as members of an international youth subculture, rather than as Frenchmen.

Bars and Nightclubs

Only a small proportion of hostellers socialized with the Kanaks, or regularly went to the kava bars, although this could vary considerably at any one time, given the number of people passing through the hostel. Nearly everyone, however, visited bars and nightclubs, at least occasionally, as all the shops and all the cafés were closed in the evening (except for the expensive St-Hubert, which had a night-club attached). Along with the cinema, these were Nouméa's main form of evening entertainment. In the centre of town, they ranged from the moderately-priced decrepit to the expensively smart, the latter being less frequented. Certain bars, in the Quartier Latin, and elsewhere, were intended for serious drinking, and were haunted by near-alcoholics of all races, with a sprinkling of good-time girls [6]. Others had live music, and, or, attracted transvestites. Others appeared to cater mostly for particular ethnic groups, such as whites, Polynesians, or Kanaks. Several had definite political overtones, that of the Hotel Caledonia being a well-known gathering-point for anti-independentists. Hotel bars, such as that of Le Paris, attracted soldiers and cinema-goers. Some had night-clubs (with entry fees) attached.

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6 I had the impression that there was little organized prostitution, although I heard of the existence of brothels. Professional street-walkers were most visible in the Quartier Latin. However, there appeared to be a large number of occasional opportunists, and, or, "good-time" girls, who wanted an enjoyable evening with those (soldiers?) who had money to spend.

Outside the centre of town was the long beach of the Anse Vata, with its tourist hotels, and cheerful nightlife fronting the Coral Sea. Here there were outdoor "snacks", food-vans, cafes, restaurants, and a variety of nightclubs. Ranging from the minimalist pink décor and mirrors of "No Comment " (the last of its many changes of name and style while I was in Nouméa), to the stark interior of "Le Métro" with its "house music" and strobe lighting. Adjoining "Le Métro" was "Charleys' Bar" (sic), with an American theme and mural of G.I.s queuing up to purchase half-clad Polynesian beauties, with cigarettes offered to their male relatives. All these nightclubs offered drink at highly inflated prices, loud music, flashing lights, and dance-space. Up a side-street was "Vini Pou Danser", whose "zouk" music and smart silver/ black decor seemed to attract a largely West Indian, "Antillaise", clientèle. The two biggest, however, were the joint clubs of "Startruck" and "La Guingette", the second sign-posted as "Le Bal à Jules", who, cloth-capped and mustachioed, smiled down at his potential customers.

"Startruck" and "La Guingette" attracted a variety of customers, "La Guingette" being older and more staid, as opposed to "Startruck" 's ravers. According to their choice of music, people moved from one to the other. Both clubs appeared to attract all races, provided they could afford the entrance fee. The most noticeable clients, although not the most numerous, were the Tahitian "mahu". Often over six feet tall, especially if wearing high heels, they would hang together

purposefully, sometimes entering the ladies' lavatories en masse in a vaguely menacing manner. In the centre of town, they could be spotted, in the evening, going into the bar of the Hotel San Francisco: as yet another dainty figure walked by, in fishnet tights and leather, those eating at the "snack" on the corner would speculate as to whether it were a man or a woman.

The "mahu" may have included Polynesians from some other islands but were generally thought to be Tahitian. European accounts of the "mahu", or homosexual transvestites, go back to the eighteenth century. Publicly adopting women's rôles, either in dress or household work, the "mahu" appear to be partly socially and partly biologically constructed. Boys may be encouraged to behave like girls, or at least, not stopped from doing so. When I was in New Caledonia, I heard some vague references to the youngest boy of Tahitian families being brought up as a girl, if his parents wanted a daughter. Levy does not mention this. He sees the "mahu " as public stabilisers of masculine identity: heterosexual adolescents see what they are not, so that they know what they will not become (Levy 1973:130-139, 472).

The "mahu", like the kava bars, appeared exotic and counter-cultural to the hostellers, newly arrived on the territory. Again, this was a misperception. The "mahu", like kava drinking and other Pacific rituals, were an accepted part of Nouméan life. This was because they were typically Tahitian, and, as such, contributed to the image of New

Caledonia's tolerant, multi-ethnic society, which France used to counter Kanak demands for independence. This multi-ethnic society is described below, followed by the hostellers' responses to its two dominant groups, the Caldoches and the Kanaks.

19

POLITICS, PEOPLE, AND THE REINFORCEMENT OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Nouméa was a "salad-bowl" of different ethnic groups, clinging to their particular identities. Apart from the Kanaks and the Caldoches, there were the Vanuatans, Polynesians, the Vietnamese and the Indonesians. All these people were highly visible, making up what Mesmer described in 1972 as multicoloured multiracialism, "la bigarrure multiraciale" (see Chapter 5 "Mass Immigration and the Nickel Boom").

My own acquaintance with these groups was very limited, although I constantly encountered individual members in the streets, shops and cafés of the town, and would occasionally have brief conversations with them. Nevertheless, they were so much a part of Nouméa, and New Caledonia, that they are essential to any discussion and understanding of the whole.

The Vanuatans

The Vanuatans in New Caledonia were mostly from the Francophone area of Espiritu Santo who felt themselves to be unfairly treated after Vanuatu's accession to independence.

During the last century, the New Hebrides were contested by both Britain and France but never formally annexed by either. In 1906 an Anglo-French Condominium was established and the New Hebrides declared an area of joint influence, over which neither power was to hold sovereignty. This gave the

islands two official languages, French and English, two administrative, and two rudimentary educational systems. The Condominium ceased when Vanuatu attained independence in July 1980.

The transition to independence was complicated by secessionist movements, notably the NaGriamel movement on Espiritu Santo. This "custom" movement was named after two "taboo" leaves, "namele" and "nagria", signifying a traditional way of reconciliation.

NaGriamel had been started in 1963 by Jimmy Stevens, Santo-born of mixed Scottish, French, Tongan, and Vanuatan descent. In the late 1960s and 1970s, it received moral and financial backing from American land-speculators and business libertarians. There was no evidence that they planned to undertake military action to achieve their aims. However, without their support, it seems unlikely that Jimmy Stevens would have succeeded as well as he did. [Henningham (1992:40) suggests that those behind the movement may have been encouraged by the example of Mayotte, which remained under French administration after the rest of the Comoros Islands became independent, in 1974.]

NaGriamel was widely supported by the francophone majority of European settlers, as well as by indigenous Vanuatans, who feared anglophone political domination from Port Vila. On 28 May 1980, Stevens illegally proclaimed the establishment of the new republic of Vemerana. Various

incidents followed, including the despatch of an Anglo-French joint military force, of Papuan New Guinea troops backed by Australian support personnel, and, finally, of Vanuatan police. The restoration of order, in September 1980, culminated in the trial of some seven hundred people, and the publication of a list of prohibited immigrants, including one hundred and ten French nationals.

The exile of the Santo secessionists, and the subsequent instalment of many of them in the bleak St Quentin housing estate outside Nouméa, was often mentioned by Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes. Sympathy seemed to be entirely on their side, and on that of Jimmy Stevens, whose prison sentence of fourteen and a half years was thought to be unduly harsh. [Stevens was released in 1991 and died in 1994.] [1]

The Vanuatans, including those who were legally free to reside in Vanuatu, came to Nouméa for education and work, as they had for well over a century. [Pacific "blackbirders" and sandalwood traders had long "recruited" men from the New Hebrides for work on ships, in mines, and on sugarcane plantations.] The Vanuatans, both in Vanuatu and abroad, were generally agreed to be open and friendly people, much more so than the Kanaks (an opinion voiced to me by David (see Chapter 20 below), who had a Vanuatan handyman, and echoed by an ethno-botanist who had researched there). The Vanuatans were more at ease with white people than were the Kanaks: perhaps

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1 For further details, see Keesing's Contemporary Archives 1981: 30641 30644.; John Beasant's The Santo Rebellion 1984:17, 44-71, 92-108, 151, etcetera; and The Times, obituary of "Jimmy Stevens", 17 March 1994:19.

because of the Kanaks' harsher, continuing, experience of colonialism.

I never heard of any trouble between the Vanuatans and Kanaks, or other ethnic groups. This may possibly have been because the Vanuatans were widely believed to be possessors of evil magic. The majority appeared to be in some form of low-paid employment and were church-goers, presumably Catholic as well as Protestant. More publicity appeared to be given to the Protestant aspects, in the form of gospel choirs' public performances and linked activities (this puzzled me, given that Vanuatan Protestantism appeared to be of mainly anglophone origin).

The Polynesians

The Tahitians seemed to be found in almost every commercial enterprise but other Polynesians, mainly Wallisians and Futunians, were largely employed as security guards and night-club bouncers. Massive, always wearing brown uniforms, they were to be found at the doorways of nearly every establishment, from supermarkets, to the Club Mediterranée, to hotels. As far as I knew, few of the Polynesians lived outside Nouméa, although I occasionally heard of them being employed elsewhere on the mainland, and in the Loyalty Islands, in the contract building trade. Many of the Polynesians had been brought over from Wallis and Futuna in the 1950s and 1960s. They were intended to replace the pre-war Tonkinese and Javanese indentured labourers, who had themselves replaced convict labour. The Polynesians had

worked in the nickel mines and on public construction projects such as roads and the Yaté dam. There were more Wallisians and Futunians in Nouméa, it was said, than in the whole of Wallis and Futuna.

The Polynesians, politically gathered into l'Union Oceanienne, were generally anti-independentist, as their islands' economic survival depended on France. They had been used as paid thugs, militias, ("les gros bras", "les milices") by the RPCR [2], during "les événements". By the early 1990s, this had begun to change. I heard some fiery speeches on radio and television, of which only carefully sanitised summaries were reported by Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes. Why should Polynesians vote against independence, when France left them to rot in slum-dwellings in greater Nouméa, instead of providing them with proper housing? What advantages were there for them?

The Polynesians made their presence felt in Nouméa. They were part of the myth of Caledonian identity. The Wallisians and Futunians were devoutly Catholic, a Wallisian Sunday mass being offered every week at the Cathedral. It was they who had erected the pink granite statue of the Virgin of Fatima, they who were involved in endless religious activities

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2 The "Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la Republique" (RPCR) is New Caledonia's principal anti-independentist political party. Wallisians had also been used in the troubles fomented by the secret paramilitary group MOP (Mouvement pour l'Ordre et la Paix), which was inspired by the OAS (Organisation de l'Armée Secrete), created by French settlers and military to keep Algeria French. [See Dornoy 1984:93,213; Robie 1989:132,133; Leblic 1993:38.]

David → Blood on their Banner

and devoted to the memory of St. Pierre Chanel [3]. Frequent press references were made to a "kava royale" being offered by Wallisians to some visiting dignitary. The Tahitians, who were Catholic as well as Protestant (mainly in the Tahitian Evangelical Church), were less overtly religious, but just as noticeable: Tahitian music played everywhere, Tahitian salad (raw fish marinated in lime or lemon juice) was a favourite dish. "Tamouré" dance schools existed in Nouméa: "tamouré" contests were held in Place des Cocotiers. Hips undulated at every public festival. A song was played, on and off, on the radio: "...la tamouré, le Mary D...". Nouméa's most popular tourist trip, the boat-ride on the Mary D Princess to the Amedée lighthouse, was accompanied, for those who wished, by a buffet lunch and entertainment of Polynesian dancing, by half-clad young girls in flower garlands, coconut shell brassières, and grass skirts.

The Polynesians, like the Vanuatans, shared with the Kanaks a certain sense of Pacific identity: they were wary with one another, but, political beliefs aside, could not really be said to be antagonistic groups [4]. Yet the Polynesians, like

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3 St. Pierre Chanel (1803-1841), Marist missionary in Futuna, was clubbed to death in 1841. By 1843, the whole island had become Catholic, and has remained so. Pierre Chanel was beatified in 1954, as the patron saint of Oceania: his relics were returned from Paris to Futuna in 1976.

Those few hostellers who had been to work in Wallis and, or, Futuna expressed the view that the islanders' religious devotion had more to do with gender and hierarchy than genuine belief or feeling. A chief, one said, could do what he liked, while a wayward teenage girl..., "une gamine qui fait un écart...o la la!"

4 For example, a year or so before my arrival in 1991, a wedding had been celebrated between the royal family of Wallis and that of one of the three high chiefships of Lifou. Although I never had all the details of this political affinity, the costly splendour of the accompanying feasts and ceremonies was

the "Chinois", were essential to the Caldoche presentation of Nouméa, and indeed of New Caledonia, as French, with a happy mixture of races and no original inhabitants whose claims might weigh more than others.

A Polynesian Portrait: Musu the Artist

But despite the Tahitian "mahus", my encounters with the proprietor of the Hotel Lutetia and the occasional Polynesian visitor to the hostel, there was only one Polynesian, resident in Nouméa, with whom I was acquainted. This was Musu the Futunian artist, although the exact nature of his artistic work was never clear to me. He let me know that the Polynesians, the Wallisians and the Futunians, were less than friendly with the Kanaks although they all tolerated each other publicly and got along well enough. [Doubtless there were differences among the Wallisians and the Futunians, although I never picked them up. I would guess that any political differences had something to do with the existence of the three "kings" (paramount chiefs) - one on Wallis, two on Futuna - and the way that their powers interlocked and ranked. Certain clan rights were disputed, and the ancient claims of lineages were brooded over, by those, like Musu, who felt that their ancestors had entitled them to something of which they were being cheated.]

Musu, whom I first met in the museum around the New Year 1993, was arranging a sculpture exhibition, the work of a friend of his, and wanted some advice on translating the

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often referred to. As one old man said to me, it was because it was the first time, ever, that there had been an alliance between the two islands.

sculptures' titles into English. Musu always wore the same purple velvet dress bunched around his waist, and tied his hair in a ponytail. His eyes had an intense sticky brownness that fixed on the person he was talking to, like gobs of dark treacle toffee. An air of polymorphous sexuality gave the impression that he was physically interested in any person to whom he might be speaking at a particular moment He was obsessed by his status as an artist and the fact that he had been photographed, dressed as his warrior ancestor, without any underpants, "sans slip", his hind parts covered in leaves. A well-known local photographer had first taken photographs of him dressed as his ancestor, and had exhibited them at an expensive hotel at Anse Vata. Musu had had this idea by himself and wondered whether anyone had ever had it before. He had incarnated his ancestor. He kept asking me if I had ever heard of anyone doing such a thing. I said yes, lots, initially misunderstanding his enquiry and thinking it was a request for information rather than for praise and reassurance. I told him about Edward Curtis, the photographer of American Indians [5]: but nobody, I added hastily (perhaps inaccurately), had ever done such a thing in the Pacific.

After this I used to see Musu quite regularly. He would talk with his eyes darting up and down the street to see if some passing female remembered meeting him, and, if so, whether he had her telephone number. He had been disappointed in me after a street encounter in which he had

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5 Edward Sherriff Curtis's photographs, often reconstructing tribal life under studio conditions, were published from 1907 to 1930 as The North American Indian.

asked me what was the true nature of Polynesian culture. Religion, I replied, whereupon he hissed indignantly "sexuality", "la sexualité". Mostly we met by chance in rue de Sébastopol, in the shops and cafés section leading down to the Bibliothèque Bernheim, sometimes inside the tree-filled grounds of the Bibliothèque itself. Every so often I would ask him for an interview, a proper audio-taped one that I could take back to England with me, on his views on his work, on his impressions of New Caledonia as a Polynesian artist. Usually he answered that he couldn't see the point. If he did such a tape would he be seen on television with it? Would he get some money from it? I couldn't promise him, I replied, lying halfheartedly, although I would do my best, that it would get on to English television. But many people would be interested in it, at London University where they were interested in Polynesian culture. Surely he would like to do that for me, to let them know about himself? But on the one occasion that we made a firm appointment he failed to turn up.

Musu was doubtless atypical but he demonstrates the way in which Polynesians, like all the other ethnic groups in New Caledonia, were adept at incorporating and manipulating Western symbols of exoticism: in this case, to enhance his general standing with his community, his prestige as an artist and his attractiveness to European women. He also shows, at least partly, the complexities of New Caledonia's micro-politics (Wallisians versus Futunians); the modest nature of New Caledonian Polynesian public mores (he had, apparently, scandalized everyone he knew by being photographed "sans

slip", although, having seen the photographs, it was clear that people only knew this because he had told them so); and the difficulties I had in getting people to allow me to interview them. Musu was not the only casual acquaintance who had agreed to be interviewed and then failed to show up: it was obvious that they had agreed to interviews simply to keep me quiet.

The Vietnamese and the Indonesians

The "Chinois", the Vietnamese from what was previously French Indochina, were "chán dâng", indentured labourers, and their descendants. There had been a few Japanese and Chinese, but they were swamped by the large number of Tonkinese who had been brought over to work in the nickel mines from 1891 to 1939. The Vietnamese mine-workers were freed from their indentures at the end of the Second World War (although the contracts were already time-expired), allowing the Vietnamese to Frenchify their names and settle in New Caledonia. [Minimal efforts were made towards repatriation: many of the increasingly frustrated Vietnamese eventually supported Ho Chi Minh. Vietnamese workers at the Doniambo nickel-smelting plant on 8 May 1953 celebrated, not the Allied victory in Europe, but the fall of Dien Bien Phu, on 1 May: an action that finally prompted the local authorities to organize their return home.] The Vietnamese owned small businesses, small shops, restaurants, and market gardens. The Indonesians, mainly Javanese, known as "les niaoulis" [6], appeared to do much the same. Whether there was a more or

6 "Les niaoulis" was said to come from some Javanese mothers' habit of leaving their children tied to niauoli trees, while they worked.

less exclusively Vietnamese and, or, Indonesian set of commercial activities, I could not tell. The Vietnamese and Indonesian communities were concentrated around Nouméa. Some 2,000 Indonesians had lived around Kone in the north-west, and Hienghène on the east coast, until "les événements" had persuaded them to move south for safety.

Like the Polynesians, the "Chinois" asserted their cultural identity, as did the Indonesians. The Vietnamese and Indonesian consulates were the focus of numerous reunions, cultural activities, associations (eg "L'Amicale Vietnamienne"), fund-raising fetes, "kermesses", and centenary celebrations, all well publicised in the local press. In December 1986, Vietnam and Indonesia had both successfully declared in favour of re-inscribing New Caledonia with the UN Committee on Decolonization, thus effectively classifying New Caledonia as a French colony. The Vietnamese and Indonesians, as ethnic groups, were fairly neutral vis-à-vis the question of independence, although the majority of them favoured the status quo. They felt less threatened by the Kanaks than did the Caldoches, for whom independence was to be feared as tantamount to expulsion, a second Algeria in the making. Yet comparisons between Algeria in the early 1960s and New Caledonia in the early 1990s would be profoundly misleading. It was true that retaining New Caledonia was important to French prestige and reinforced France's belief in her unique, imperial, civilizing mission. Nouméa was sometimes referred to as "Nouméa la blanche", while the name FLNKS recalled Algeria's FLN (Front de Libération Nationale).

But Algeria and New Caledonia were countries with vastly dissimilar histories, geographies, populations: the FLNKS and associated movements were far less sophisticated than the Algerian ones, French repression in New Caledonia was far less brutal (this is not to deny that brutality existed): different issues were at stake. Any resemblance to Algeria lay in the fear that the loss of New Caledonia might deliver yet another blow to French prestige, and that some Caldoches might, perhaps for a second time, lose their homes and businesses.

The Caldoches

The Caldoches' fears may have been exaggerated. Certainly there were those who felt that life would be viable in an independent Kanaky, or that some nominal or partial independence, or some political arrangement, could be reached that would enable all races to live in peace, without an abrupt elimination of the Caldoches' power and social status. But, on the whole, they identified themselves with France, proclaimed themselves to be French citizens, and created a mythology in which they glossed over their convict past, emphasised their free colons, and believed themselves to be the bearers of civilization to the primitive Kanaks. On a personal level, they were often well aware of what had and what still went on: the ill-treatment of the convicts, the deceptions practised on the colonists, the fifty powerful families, the Ballande, Lafleur, Pentecost, Barrau, and others [7], who controlled the country's economy, the oppression of the Kanaks: things rooted in

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7 For allusions to New Caledonia's powerful families, see Dornoy 1984:60.

individual memories and family histories. But collectively, because of its political implications, they denied it."Les événements"were too well-remembered, the 1988 Matignon Agreement (1988) too recent, for their confidence to be restored. The Métros, a more recent and transient group, might go back to France with their lives more or less intact, but what awaited the Caldoches? A permanent exile to the north, like the "pieds-noirs", or possibly, a home in Australia, perhaps in Queensland [8]? Or even Melbourne, whose gracious colonial architecture was frequently referred to as the epitome of culture, in contrast to Sydney's bustling cosmopolitanism? [The Caldoche horizon appeared to be limited to to Queensland, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sydney and Melbourne: I never found any sign of interest in Western Australia.]

In the meantime, the Caldoches reinforced their identity through such means as the local history society, the "Société des études historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie" (S.E.H.N.) whose publications reinforced the theme of a primitive past and a civilizing European present (and with which my own brief encounters confirmed its right-wing reputation). Its President, when I was in New Caledonia, was Bernard Brou, former engineer and leading exponent of the view that the Kanaks were not the country's original inhabitants, and so had no particular claims on its resources. Described by Robert Aldrich as hovering uneasily between history and

8 In 1976, 79 out of 100 persons interviewed at random on the streets of Nouméa declared that they would rather establish themselves in New Zealand or Australia (preferably Sydney or Queensland) than in France (Dornoy 1984:63).

antiquarianism ("New Caledonia in French historiography" (1988:26)), the S.E.H.N. flourished. Many of its publications strike odd, unscholarly, notes. These range from the lurid speculations of Mélanésiens d'Aujourd'hui to political point-scoring in Jean Vanmai's Chán Dâng.

Mélanésiens d'Aujourd'hui (1976:52-53) co-authored by a group of indigenous Caledonians, "par un groupe d'autochtones calédoniens", dwells fearfully on alcohol, sexual depravity, and Anglo-Saxon sexual tourism. [I have no evidence of sexual tourism while I was in New Caledonia.] In Jean Vanmai's Chán Dâng, Georges Pisier, a well-known local historian and former colonial official, uses his "Preface" to inveigh against Vietnamese communism. He refers to French citizens imprisoned by the Japanese in Indochina, after the fall of the Vichy government, then by the Vietminh. His real argument, not expressed openly, seems to be that Vietnam should have remained a French colony: so, by implication, should New Caledonia.

But the history which the S.E.H.N. chose to emphasise was highly selective, glossing over any unsavoury episodes. I noticed that there were virtually no press, S.E.H.N., or other references to New Caledonia's original surrender to Vichy, during the various commemorations of the Second World War held while I was in New Caledonia. At the very least, I had expected some discussion of the political impact of the "broussards" ' descent on Nouméa in 1940.

The S.E.H.N. was just one of the several cultural-cum-intellectual associations and activities available in Nouméa. Nouméa, I discovered, was the paradise of amateurs.

Distractions and Discontent

Nouméa was a small town which had long been isolated from the sophistication of metropolitan life and which, even in the early nineteen-nineties, made its own amusements. So there was a history society but also local painters, sculptors, writers, photographers, and musicians. They were often, if not exactly self-taught, not professionally trained, but Nouméa gave scope to their activities. Works that would have been considered so-so in France, not commercially viable because of the competition, prospered in Nouméa. Small bands and local singers won professional engagements. Ballet-schools and local theatre groups gave performances in central venues, such as the FOL. Talks and lectures were announced in the local press. Local painters and photographers had exhibitions in hotels and galleries, and had their works published as postcards. Métros, as well as Caldoches, found outlets for their talents. Beauty contests were held, their endless parades of "miss" intended to put New Caledonia on the global beauty circuit. Not just political groups, but religious, sporting, social, business, clubs and associations flourished. Business clubs, the Kiwanis, Rotary and Lions, were predictably right-wing, despite their several good works (for instance, the Lions concentrated on helping the blind). [They were said to have members who had been connected with the RPCR and violent activities during "les événements".]

Sporting associations, in particular, seemed less politicized and attracted Kanaks as well as other ethnic groups. [This is not to say that sporting associations were fully multi-racial in their membership. Different ethnic groups seemed to favour different associations.] Football and volley-ball flourished among the Kanaks, as did women's cricket, presumably introduced by LMS missionaries to the Loyalty Islands in the last century. Cycling was popular with whites, less so with Kanaks: partly, I think, because Kanaks did not use bicycles as means of transportation and saw sport cycling as a pointless activity. Sport, especially water-sports, was Nouméa's main leisure activity. There were regular championships, widely reported. Sailing, diving, water-skiing, windsurfing, were there for those (Caldoches and Métros) who could afford them, swimming for those who could not. The slight risk of shark attack added frisson. Occasionally a swimmer, a diver, or a sailor, disappeared. [One woman told me how a friend of hers had windsurfed across Anse Vata to a small island, with a fin following behind her.]

Robert, the oceanographer, once said to me that there was something about Nouméa, about New Caledonia, that interfered with his ability to think. I agreed with him, for I had the same problem, although neither of us could put a name to it. With hindsight, I think that it was not just an overdose of sun, sea, and blue sky, coupled with the relatively few books and poor facilities in the territory's main library, the Bibliothèque Bernheim, plus a general lack of intellectual

stimulus. It was that New Caledonia's mixture of sport and low- to middle-brow culture was a collective distraction from an unpleasant social reality. This may tie up with Chesneaux's observation that New Caledonia lacked social and moral welfare organizations. It seemed to me, as an outsider, that that the territory had a lot of clubs and associations but Jean Chesneaux (1988:73), in "Kanak Political Culture/French Political Practice" states that " 'la vie associative', the activities of non-profit associations concerned with social welfare, ... cultural clubs and so on, which are so ubiquitous and influential in France, hardly exist at all in New Caledonia. Institutions which have a moral purpose, such as Third World solidarity organizations ... have little or no impact on the territory."

New Caledonia, as already stated, was both inward looking (in the sense of having little interest in the wider world, apart from France and its immediate geographical neighbours) and money-orientated, although this financial orientation was less noticeable among the rural Kanaks. In Maré, I had seen some people living in what appeared, to newly-arrived Western eyes, to be the most extreme rural poverty, even though, when analysed out and taking other factors into account, the poverty was not nearly as shocking as it looked (a New Zealand part-Maori woman who came to the hostel, and who saw some of my photographs, exclaimed that people wouldn't be allowed to live in such conditions in New Zealand, if they wished to keep their children with them). When I expressed my initial shock and horror at Kanak living

conditions to David (discussed later), he pointed out that there was a history of white rural poverty in New Caledonia: and, as a couple of hostellers said to me, there were deserted regions of rural France where people had no running water, electricity, or modern conveniences in their homes.

As already stated, there was a kind of general political denial of social reality, neither quite admitted nor quite repressed, which sometimes gave way to a shrugging acquiesence, on the part of the Caldoches. After all, every ethnic group in New Caledonia was concerned to safeguard its own political position for the referendum of 1998: and for all, except the Kanaks, this effectively meant maintaining existing arrangements with the Kanaks at the bottom of the heap.

Cultural politics: the metropolitan French versus the Caldoches

Since the 1988 Matignon Agreement, at least part of the metropolitan French response to Kanak poverty and demands for independence (apart from the new money being injected into the economy in the form of rural health, education, and the vocational training of four hundred Kanak managers over ten years (a project known as the "400 cadres") has been a kind of high-principled monocultural goodwill. This was exemplified both by the creation of the architecturally prestigious Centre Jean-Marie Tjibaou and by the comments made to me by several anthropologists and other well-meaning French people, including some of those passing through the hostel. These dwelt less on sociological analysis than on the generous,

hospitable and kind nature of the Kanaks (with which I fully agreed, except for a few reservations), an attitude which sometimes blew over into full-scale romantic essentialism. This cultural goodwill towards exotic Others is essentially bourgeois and aristocratic, and its immediate, Catholic, origins can be traced back for well over a hundred years (Rabinow 1989: 107-108, 123, 169, 184-195, 282-285; Le Wita 1994: 91, 116-117).

Today this goodwill is ethical and secular, as well as Catholic (Le Wita 1994: 51-52, 91, 110-117; Zeldin 1983: 495-496). Its main characteristic is to see its own cultural order as universal, and the social world, including poverty, hierarchy and social inequality, as natural; emphasising the personal rather than the collective in behaviour towards others. This attitude is hardly new, continuing from Greek, then Roman, tendencies to see all Others (the exotic (barbarians), the poor, the mad, the sick, the disaffected) as somehow belonging to the same (uncivilized) category: an over-classification of "us and them".

This results in what might be called a partial myth of reconciliation. Insofar that the social world is seen as natural, there is a belief that personal kindness towards others will help reconcile those less fortunate than to their lot: in other words the poor are treated on the same level as the physically handicapped, suffering from an unfortunate condition which should be accepted rather than resisted by any fruitless attempts at major alteration. Hence, as Kohler

scathingly remarks (1988: 174-192), there is an attitude, particularly prevalent in New Caledonian Catholicism, which, instead of realizing the true and intractable nature of social conflict, sees longings for reconciliation where none exist (taking well-meaning members of its own congregations as typical of a whole), and calls upon the population to exercise charity and tolerance. I should add that this would not be a completely naive strategy in France or other Western societies where the combination of daily pressures for survival with a degree of social mobility, plus the unappealing spectacle of failed and failing former communist and fascist dictatorships, prevents the working-classes from combining to radically change the nature of society. But in New Caledonia, in which visibly different ethnic groups with radically different social organization and values were in conflict, this dispersion of tension through a limited degree of social mobility did not apply.

The other metropolitan French attitude was a tolerance similar to that used towards divergent minorities, such as the Corsicans, the Bretons and the Basques, in France. Basically, this implied that although French culture was the best, there was always room for the cultural expressions of minorities, provided this did not lead to the ousting of French culture and its replacement by another (Zeldin 1983: 11-30; also see McDonald 1989 for a detailed discussion of all these issues as they apply to the learning of Breton in schools (eg 1989: 44-69), and conflicting Breton demands for relative cultural and political autonomy which may include demands for political

independence from France (eg 1989: 73-99, 122-125, 133-137, 146-151). So intense were French beliefs in the "rayonnement" of French civilization (Zeldin 1983: 34; Vivier 1992:28) and its associated benefits of health and education that I think most people were genuinely unable to conceive that some of the Kanaks might prefer their own version.

For example, Diane, the nurse with whom I briefly shared a room, was a staunch Basque cultural autonomist, who spoke Basque at home but who in no way enlarged her sympathies to equate Basque and Kanak culture or to think that Kanak culture was in any way preferable to French. Yet she was a well-meaning professional young woman, whose attitude towards the Kanaks was that French education, medical treatment, vaccination programmes, and other benefits, which could be interpreted as cultural imperialism, were entirely beneficial.

The Caldoches, having everything to lose, and being unaffected by the high culture that characterized some of the metropolitan French, lacked romanticism and were more grittily realistic in their political perspectives. Desperate to remain under the protection of France, few of them believed in reconciliation, if that meant sacrificing most of their social and economic advantages.

As for the Kanaks and other Pacific Island groups, a cynical view would be that their demands had been put on hold while they paid lip-service to talk of reconciliation, waiting to see if France would live up to her promises, get the

economy going and improve their respective socio-economic positions. At the same time, the Kanaks, and others, probably had more to gain economically by making peace and trusting France than by opposing her.

Fear and Shame as Social Barriers

New Caledonia was above all what Louis-José Barbançon calls Le Pays du Non-Dit (1992), a place where gossip and rumour were rife but where certain things were said, if at all, in coded language (see Spencer, below). The motivation behind this was not fear, as in dictatorships, but shame. If, as Jean Guiart says (In La terre est le sang des morts (1985)), the social register-cum-studbook, kept by all "good" Caledonian families, disappeared under the flood of Allied forces and consequent social mixing of World War II, nevertheless there persisted a deep unease among those who were descended from convicts rather than free colonists.

For instance, Barbançon (1992: 34, 35), referring to the 1950s, says [9]:

"For the first time, the Nouméan middle-classes had their certainties shaken; the entry of Kanaks into political life, at the same time as the first major demands made by the

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9 "Pour la première fois, la bourgeoisie nouméenne est attaquée dans ses certitudes: l'entrée des Kanaks dans la vie politique, correspond egalement aux premières grandes revendications syndicales, aux mariages entre petitis-enfants de bagnards et de colons libres, les registres que l'on tenait avec soin dans toutes les bonnes familles pour éviter que les mésalliances deviennent inutiles; tout un monde colonial est remis en cause; un petit-fils de bagnard devient sénateur de la République et l'on ne peut rien dire, parce qu'il est riche; un petit-fils d'Italien condamné au bagne devient Député et l'on ne peut rien dire, parce que sa conduite pendant la guerre a été exemplaire; même les Vietnamiens mêlent leurs voix à la contestation." (1992: 34, 35).

unions, as marriages between the grandchildren of convicts and free settlers: the social registers, carefully kept by all good families, to avoid mismatches, lost their use; a whole colonial world was being questioned; the grandson of a convict became a republican Senator, and no-one could say anything, because he was rich; the grandson of an Italian condemned to penal transportation became a Deputy, and no one could say anything, because his war record was exemplary; even the Vietnamese had their say."

The shame affected not only the Caldoches, victims of "le bagne", but also the Kanaks who had seen their ancestral lands despoiled and their traditions crumble. In the late nineteenth-century the Kanaks apparently lost the will to live, with a falling birth-rate, as did people elsewhere in the Pacific. The result was shame, acquiescence and silence.

Without discussing the other possible origins of Kanak shame culture, the French emotional adjective which I heard most commonly used by Kanaks was "embarrassed", "ashamed": "gêné". It seemed to me that this shared sense of shame was yet another example of the Caldoches having more in common with the Kanaks than with people from metropolitian France. Barbançon (1992:9), emphasising this common heritage, says [10]:

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10 "Je me souviens de la réflexion de ma mère à qui je confiais mon intention d'effectuer des recherches sur le Bagne:

'Mon fils, m'a-t-elle dit, il faut laisser les morts dormir en paix, ils ont assez souffert.'

Quelques mois plus tard, m'étant rendu à Lifou, pour assister à une conference sur l'arrivée du christianisme dans l'île, j'interrogeai un auditeur Kanak sur cette période et sur les oppositions entre catholiques et protestants, il

"I remember my mother's remark when I confided to her my intention of researching the penal settlements:

'My son,' she said to me 'the dead must be left to sleep in peace, they've suffered enough.'

A few months later, having gone to Lifou, to attend a conference on the arrival of Christianity in the island, I asked a listening Kanak about past times and the differences between Catholics and Protestants. He replied 'Our dead ancestors must not be awakened.' ...

One did not wish to know and the other did not wish to bring up the quarrels between clans. Past troubles, for both of them, had become taboo. Everyone had contributed to the silence. Generations later, this had translated into mutual misunderstanding."

Even in the early 1990s, the stigma remained. [One hosteller, grumbling about the Caldoches, asked rhetorically what could be expected from a country inhabited by the descendents of thieves and prostitutes, "descendants de putes et de voleurs"?] The remains of the prison chapel and other buildings at Nouville, virtually opposite, and partially adjoining the ADCK, liberally decorated with graffiti, began to be destroyed as part of a plan to extend the Université Française du Pacifique. A small protest in the local press asked whether this was appropriate, saying that in Australia

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me répondit: 'Il ne faut pas réveiller les vieux qui sont morts.'

...

L'une ne voulait savoir et l'autre ne voulait pas soulever des querelles claniques. ""Les événements"" chez les uns comme chez les autres étaient devenus tabous.

Tous ont contribuée au silence. Des générations plus tard, cela se traduit par une double méconnaissance."

people had learned to accept their convict past and incorporate it into historical tourism. The destruction continued, seemingly unabated.

Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes

Consequently, because of this shameful past, discretion reigned. New Caledonia was full of rumours, aggravated by the media's self-censorship. Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes, the only daily newspaper, valiantly attempted to keep the lid on things, however desperate the situation. Its small-town response to whatever crisis was brewing was more a question of editorial policy than of its staff's incompetence.

A journalist working on Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes once said to me that they didn't really have the authority ("on n'a pas vraiment le droit..") to do investigative reporting. A friend of mine, who worked for the newspaper as a proof-reader on 13/14 March 1992, the night that Prisunic burnt down, said that a large number of the news-stories written on the subject had been censored or spiked.

Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes had been owned since 1987 by Robert Hersant, proprietor of the right-wing French newspaper Le Figaro, whose views on New Caledonia may be judged as broadly in accord with those of Thiérry Desjardins, Le Figaro's principal correspondent in New Caledonia during "les événements". Desjardins is the author of Ils veulent rester français (1985). In this, he constantly contrasts what he sees as French civilization with Kanak primitivism, by

referring to Jean-Marie Tjibaou, a former Catholic priest, as "le defroqué" (1985:160), harping endlessly upon cannibalism, and making several wild assertions, in intemperate language, that remain unsubstantiated by other writers.

Michael Spencer, in "It's not all Black and White" (1988:189-193) discusses the relationship between the two newspapers. Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes focussed on daily events and people's reactions to them, as it did while I was there: "...it never attempts to answer the question: why did it happen? And perhaps, because the readers live where the events are occurring, they all know why. On the other hand, there are clearly different opinions within the territory, or nothing would have happened - unless one subscribes to the 'spontaneous occurrence' theory." Spencer argues that the presentation of random facts, "faits divers", is to reassure the public as to the continuation of the social order: this effectively means the continuation of white supremacy and political dependency on France (also see Adorno 1994:49, who argues that the Los Angeles Times's mixture of petty astrological advice and serious dramas resembles a Freudian "dream factory", such as the movies, which channel aggression and other threatening impulses, and so superficially strengthen the individual's capacity to deal with (an often unpleasant and seemingly irrational) social reality). The juxtaposition of serious news stories with trivia tells us that crises happen but life goes on. As pointed out by both Simmel and Coser (cited in Downes and Rock 1988: 109), conflict is often surprisingly orderly, and less disruptive than might be

supposed, as it is one of several interacting social processes; its useful functions include the resolution of gnawing strains in society and the promotion of solidarity by those bonding together to confront an enemy.

Barbançon (1993:55-61) sees Hersant's ownership as yet another example of the corruption of Caldoche culture by the representatives of metropolitan France. The souring of relationships between the Caldoches and the Kanaks followed the Caldoches' abdication of their cultural responsibilities in the 1970s (at the time of the nickel boom). [In other words, New Caledonia has been corrupted by monied outsiders. This is the perpetual plaint of the Caldoches but a partly justified one.]

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THE HOSTELLERS' INTERACTIONS WITH THE CALDOCHES

Nouméa's ethnic and social diversity meant that people clung to their particular groups, as if seeking safety in numbers. Even the Métros, in their different regional associations, evinced a nostalgia for home: "Les amis du pays basque", "L'amicale nantaise"... . Even the hostellers were affected.

Leaving "Le Métro", late one night, a fight erupted between a hosteller and a young Caldoche, who saw the hosteller leaving with a Caldoche girl. To a cry of "I'm not frightened of you, (big-) ears!", "je n'ai pas peur de vous, les z'oreilles!", a mêlée started, with the male hostellers on the beach side of the pavement rushing back to help, then separate, the main combatants, then checking the surroundings to see if there were any people from the hostel left, "gens de l'auberge", who might need to walk back in their company. It was a loose tribalism, based on common experience, and the knowledge of being an outsider in the town. The hostellers did things in groups, as most people did in New Caledonia - partly because they wanted to and partly because Nouméa's buses ceased in the late afternoon and made any excursions dependent on private cars or walking. So visiting Anse Vata combined amusement with healthy exercise, as people would dance for hours, and then walk back some six or seven kilometres to the hostel at three or four in the morning, stopping on the way at the boulangerie which was just baking

its first batch of breads and croissants. These group activities meant that those staying at the hostel were identifiable as incoming Métros, of modest means: whom others, long-established on the territory, would teach how to behave. In practice, this meant the Nouméan Caldoches, passing on their opinions of the Kanaks. All these opinions, in their refined and coarser versions, as given below, were fairly typical, and repeated by the Caldoches to almost any new arrival. So they became familiar to the hostellers, as they did to me.

I once witnessed an argument between Clément, a Sydneyite of Guadeloupan descent, and a Caldoche girl whom he had picked up at the beach at Nouville (popular with the hostellers, as it allowed topless sunbathing). He made some gently goading remarks about New Caledonia, Guadeloupe, France and the Kanaks, which rapidly escalated into a row over his support of independence. The Caldoche girl became chokingly tearful, at bay in front of these older and more sophisticated outsiders: we just didn't understand, she said what things were like. The Kanaks were like herds of animals, "comme des troupeaux"; they did everything together, they never acted individually, she had seen them at political meetings, it was incredible that they all voted for independence and no-one spoke out against it.

This group mentality was frequently referred to both by Kanaks and other races, some of whom saw it as promoting solidarity and political change, others who saw it as a sign of

backwardness and irresponsibility.

The Hostellers' Views of the Caldoches

The hostellers' and ex-hostellers' views of the Caldoches, and the weight they gave to their opinions, differed according to personal circumstances. The workers tended to be better acquainted with the Caldoches, whom they met at work, than with the Kanaks and Pacific Islanders. The travellers were more interested in the exotic, notably the Kanaks and others, whom they met in kava bars and elsewhere.

All the hostellers agreed that the Métros were indistinguishable from French people in general but the Caldoches were different. Some hostellers were largely indifferent or non-judgmental. Some Caldoches were racist, some were not. Most Caldoches were against independence. One young woman simply saw the Caldoches as old-fashioned, "comme nos grands-parents".

Paul, a round-the-world traveller doing a working stopover, was of French nationality but immigrant descent, and very sensitive to racial issues. He saw the Caldoches as provincial fascists, as did some other hostellers. Those hostellers who had taken jobs outside Nouméa sometimes expressed their opinions of the Caldoches. Paul, who had a short-term job growing melons near Bouloupari, was particularly vocal. He had already seen Kanaks manhandled by the gendarmes in the streets of Nouméa. As for Bouloupari! All the whites in the area were racists. They had stolen the

land from the Kanaks, exploited them, and treated them like dirt. Paul's boss had said that when he saw a Kanak, he hit his car's accelerator, "quand je vois un Kanak, j'accelère!" The more money and land the Caldoches had, the worse they were. Others told me variations on this theme. Yet others said how nice, how simple, the rural Caldoches were when they invited you into their homes, to join them on hunting trips at the weekend.

The Caldoches were old-fashioned [1] in the way they behaved, furnished their houses, with framed photographs everywhere, emphasising family and traditional roles within it (men were seen as household heads, women ideally stayed at home or had only minor jobs, parents enforced their authority over their children). Like the Kanaks and Polynesians, they removed their flip-flops, "claquettes" at the door, walking barefoot about the house. People would smile, not always maliciously, at their speech, their accents, their turns of phrase: (eg "Awa" for "Ah oui", "il est bon?" for "ça va?"), which were shared with the comparatively uneducated members of other ethnic groups in New Caledonia, used less often by those who had grown up in Nouméa. Anglicised words for cattle-farming ("le stockman", "le paddock", "le creek", "le quarter-horse", "le chien bleu", "les poken" (pejorative: Australian and other Anglophones, from "English spoken"); nicknames for other groups - "les chinois", "les niaoulis", "les taipouets" (the Tahitians), "les wallipets" (the Wallisians);

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1 Theodore Zeldin, in An Intimate History of Humanity (1994: 22-24), quotes Police Corporal Lydie Rosier, aged twenty-seven, formerly posted to New Caledonia: "there, she says 'They live as people lived a hundred years ago.' "

words for males and females of other races (eg "la popinée" - the Kanak woman (plus several others of an even more derogatory nature); "le tayo" - the Kanak man (obsolete), "la bayou" - the Javanese woman): all these words were cause for amusement but also a recognizable part of Caledonian identity [2].

"La Culture Caldoche": the Rural Past and the Myth of Caledonian Identity

Before the Second World War, and, for some time afterwards, there existed what is sometimes referred to as Caldoche culture, "la culture caldoche". This term described the lifestyle and attitudes of people of largely French origin who were the descendants of convicts or free settlers, but who were usually poor, comparatively ill-educated, living isolated rural lives, surrounded by large broods of children. Their horizons were those of their neighbourhood: often they had never been to Nouméa, far less to Australia or France. Their parents or grand-parents might have known a wider world, but they did not. These Caldoches could speak at least one Melanesian language; they had an understanding of 'la coutume', and got on well with their Kanak neighbours, even though they

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2 The spelling and origins of most of these words are given in Mille et un mots calédoniens (1982) (Comité de rédaction, Fédération des oeuvres laiques). "Le paddock" means a small piece of enclosed land but also the homestead: "le quarter-horse" is a tough and spirited cross-breed used in cattle-herding, rodeos, and racing over short distances; "le chien bleu" is a greyish cattle-dog of Australian descent, said to have dingo blood.

"La bayou" is said to be from the Javanese "Mbak Ayu", sister. "La popinée"" is said by Marie-Joseph Dubois (Aventurier de Dieu, 1985:24-25) to be from the Tahitian "vahine", but Robie (1989:86) gives a more insulting interpretation, "Black Doll", used by early settlers to refer to their Kanak concubines and children. "Popinée"" is also a Caledonian term for certain sorts of shellfish.

felt themselves to be inevitably superior. They travelled by boat and on horse-back, there being no roads nearby: they lived simple lives, ate what they grew, traded occasionally with neighbours, and were often in debt to Ballande and other companies.

This "culture', it was generally agreed, had now disappeared, except in some remote pockets with elderly people who had grown up before the Second World War. Even the rural Caldoches rarely spoke Melanesian languages or knew their tribal neighbours well. This was the result of greater prosperity and better education, Caldoche (and Kanak) children being sent to secondary school in Nouméa, instead of growing up on the farms: of roads and cars and better transport, of more opportunities to find work elsewhere and see the world. The exodus of the rural population towards Nouméa, fuelled by "les événements", had further attenuated the rural Caldoches' distinctiveness, as they adopted an urban lifestyle, and encountered other ethnic and social groups.

The Caledonian identity myth identifies the "broussard" ("bushman", rural Caldoche) as a stout-hearted fellow living in peace with his cattle, his white and Melanesian neighbours, fond of riding, fishing and shooting, hunting deer and pigeons in the bush, descended from free colonists rather than convicts. He (or his relatives) gathered in Nouméa in September 1940 to support de Gaulle and stop the island's government declaring for Vichy France. The Tonton Marcel cartoons of Bernard Berger, as post-cards, in Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes, and in

comic-book form, reinforce this, by depicting an idyllic country-spot where politics never intrude, and where people of all races live happy, isolated lives. [Themes which led Bernard Brou, Jean Van Mai, and other right-wing literary figures to hail Berger's A l'ombre des niaoulis (1992) as truly Caledonian, with Brou comparing Berger to Maupassant (Les Nouvelles Hebdo: Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes 13 August 1992).]

Berger's stories, such as La dame blônche (1980s? date unknown) play amusingly upon local legends, like that of the Japanese war-plane crashed in the mountains, full of treasure and never found (which may have had its origin in the war-time disappearance of two American aeroplanes in the Humboldt region). Jean Mariotti (1901-1975) author of A bord de l'Incertaine, (1942) and other novels, is always presented as the quintessential "broussard" (eg as in Jacqueline Sénès's radio programme: "La biographie d'un écrivain calédonien: Jean Mariotti" (1976), sold as a teaching aid-cassette in Nouméa). As Barbançon points out (1992:10,11), Mariotti's convict descent, flight to Paris, and suicidal impulses are conveniently ignored.

Like all myths, this said something important about the Caldoches, perhaps less about the way they saw themselves, then about the way they and others had seen themselves in the past and still wished to be thought of today. Like most beliefs, it had grains of truth. There were unsophisticated, good-hearted people whose men loved to fish and hunt and live

in the country, whose women were happy to keep house. There were people who, at least in the past, were relatively poor, had got on with their Melanesian and other neighbours, and had an extended sense of family, which might include relatives of other races, by blood or marriage. They were attached to their land, which had, in the past, defined their respectability and provided a living, separating them from convicts and shop-keepers. They often had a blind-spot, a racism dating from years of social superiority. In New Caledonia, people usually defined themselves by what they were not, rather than what they were: ethnic and social categories were essentially fixed. The Métros knew that they were French, not Caldoche. The Caldoches knew that they were French, because they had been told so by school-teachers and politicians, and could see that they were not Kanak, Javanese, or Poken. As Luc Michel puts it, in "Clues to Identity" (1995: 278), describing participants in an international group analytic group, held in Switzerland: "Each participant caricatures his or her cultural position and is pushed into doing this by what the others project on him." People might call themselves Caledonian, especially if they were of mixed blood, but in general, they did so to identify themselves to French and other outsiders. Although most of the passive and subordinate ethnic groups of the Territory upheld the dominant Caldoche system of meanings (a version of Marx's dictum that the ruling ideas are the ideas of the rulers: Hannerz 1980: 286, 290), a new national identity, fluid enough to accommodate either Kanaky or France, had not yet developed. In this New Caledonia was like pre-independence Belize; and, perhaps, as in Belize, independence would lead to

the deliberate political creation of a national public culture (Wilks 1995: 112-115).

Bourail Fair

The height of Caldoche self-assertion and presentation was at the annual agricultural fair at Bourail, which I attended in August 1992. Here women sold handicrafts, plants, farm-produce: from vegetables to honey, to chili preserves, "achards", to guava jelly. Saddlemakers sold their saddles, the S.E.H.N. their publications. Sheep-shearing competitions and displays were held. Horses and cattle were judged and exhibited. Motor-cycles raced over dirt tracks. The most colourful events were the afternoon rodeos, which had only been established some ten years or so ago, but was guaranteed to attract spectators. Prizes included trips to Australia for further rodeo training.

As the Saturday rodeo got under way, the announcer worked the crowd with facetious comments. Men of all colours dropped onto bulls and horses. One bull stood stolidly throughout his ordeal. The announcer asked if he had come out of the deep-freeze: "Il est congelé, le mec!" Appreciative laughter. A girl called Anne-Marie had tried to enter and been turned down. Every so often the announcer referred to her. So Anne-Marie thought she could ride a horse like a man, did she? Another contestant hit the ground. "Better stay at home and do the housework, eh?"; "Mieux vaut rester à la maison et faire le ménage, eh, Anne-Marie?" Titters.

There was a Melanesian hut, and stand, and some Kanaks at the fair, but not very many. The white spectators predominated. For all its good-humour, I thought that I detected a slight underlying tension that might have been connected with what seemed a large number of gendarmes on the approach roads and near the fairground itself. It was not just the hope of picking up a few speedy or drunken drivers that brought them there. The gendarmes represented the French state. Bourail's agricultural fair was an assertion of land ownership and white supremacy.

David and Leah: the Urban Present

David and Leah, two wealthy Anglophone Caldoches, owned a travel agency. I had an introduction to them as friends of friends, and met them soon after I arrived in New Caledonia. On the few occasions that I was with them, David and Leah were both extremely kind to me but our acquaintance ended as it became clear that they disapproved both of my doing fieldwork in Maré and of my staying in the hostel. I am sure that their opinions were typical of many people in the upper echelons of Nouméan society, which is why they are repeated here.

David and Leah clearly preferred things as they had been before "les événements," or, even further back, the early 1960s: the Kanaks on their reserves, rarely visiting Nouméa: Nouméa as "Nouméa la blanche", a small backwater preserving colonial attitudes.

David had grown up in Nouméa: Leah, his wife, had come from England. Both tolerated, indeed liked, Kanaks, in what they considered to be their unobtrusive place. David, tougher, less finicky, was unperturbed by dirt, disease, and what his wife considered strange, uncivilized, habits. Kind-hearted, moral, personally good; business-orientated and extremely right-wing, they recognised themselves as victims of history.

They and their friends were horrified by the prospect of Kanak independence and what they anticipated as the inevitable destruction of French achievements and modernisation. New Caledonia would go the way of Madagascar, from prosperity to penury, they claimed. How ungrateful the Kanaks were, Leah told me, when it was the Caledonians who had developed and civilized the country. The Kanaks were decadent and degenerate. David and Leah had a fund of terrible stories, of rapes, attacks, and murder. David gave me a detailed description of the 1985 murder of Lucien George, father of Guy George, who later was later elected to New Caledonia's territorial congress and became New Caledonia's leader of "Le Front National" (with which David sympathised). Lucien George, aged eighty-one, and his dog, were hacked to death by drunks while walking on the beach [3].

The way ahead, they believed, was through business

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3 Lucien George's murderers were Kanaks from Hienghène and it was later argued that their action was a political act in retaliation for the ten Kanaks killed at Hienghène on 5 December 1984. The trial of Lucien George's murderers in Paris in 1991 culminated in their release, and the release of the murderer of Yves Tual, as an act of mercy (widely interpreted as an act of political expediency, following the acquittal of the murderers of Hienghène, in 1987).

development, tourism with high prices, luxury hotels, no backpackers, and subservient Melanesians assisting in a pseudo-Tahitian image of carefree, Frenchified, Polynesia.

If the Kanaks were badly off, David told me, it was because expectations were too high - up to the 1970s, most of the rural Caldoches had lived in equally primitive conditions. [James McNeish's novel, Penelope's Island, (1990:127) describes a Caldoche homestead of the 1970s:

"Felix's family...lived on the west coast halfway up an airless valley amid vast bald hills with the shadow of the Humboldt mountains in the distance. This was allegedly the dry coast. ...A few tropical flowers poked up from the trampled earth, turkey and geese slithered about in the mud. The 'Homestead' was also made of mud. Felix's parents had built it themselves, there being no cement available when they married, by pounding the mud into bricks using their bare feet. Indeed Maman, his mother, wore bare feet for the duration of our stay. ... It was one of these distributed places with duckboards linking wooden shacks and outbuildings across islands of ooze: there was no bathroom, no sink, the only tap was beneath a dripping water-butt under which Papa had improvised a piece of old lorry to stand on."]

Not only did the Kanaks expect too much, David maintained, but as workers they were unreliable [4]. It is true

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4 " 'Le mélanésien n'a pas la notion du temps': absentéisme et retards provoquent des contacts difficiles entre employeurs et employés: quand il y a une fête à la tribu, on sait quand il part, on ne sait pas quand il revient...' " Tjibaou, Missotte, Folco, and Rives in Kanaké 1976:13

that there was widespread rejection of the low-status, ill-paid, often dead-end, jobs usually available to young Kanaks in Nouméa (jobs that usually entailed working for white people).

I am not suggesting that this was a form of laziness or general unwillingness to work. My experiences in Tenane and elsewhere were that people worked very hard indeed: but it was work on their own land, or for the good of the tribe, or for a church, political, or other organization. There was also an attitude that it was not abstract clock time that mattered but the amount of time needed to finish a particular job. Comments made by David and others confirmed the attitudes described by Tjibaou, Missotte, Folco, and Rives in Kanaké 1976:13:

" 'The Melanesian has no concept of time': absenteeism and delays make for difficult relations between employers and employees: when a tribal feast is being held, one knows when he leaves, but not when he will return ... ."

The Kanaks were lazy, pronounced a French female friend of Leah's, exploited by their chiefs, who stole the Government money given to them to bring about improvements. [Throughout my time in New Caledonia, I noticed that the French Métros would make scandalized references to Kanak politicians and elected officials over a series of trivial incidents, implying a misuse of public funds, that would have been ignored in connection with a French or Caldoche politican: for example, so-and-so's wife was given a lift in a helicopter, an overly expensive official car had been purchased for a politician, so-

and-so's cousin had been given a job.]

The Kanaks, said my métis driving instructor, originating from Madagascar and married to a Tahitian, did everything in groups, accepted no individual charge, had no financial probity, and never settled their debts. [He was owed money by a Kanak public servant.]

The importance which the Caldoches attached to family was made plain when I met David: soon after meeting me, he mentioned his Caledonian heritage, saying that his great-grandfather was a Joubert (descended, I later discovered, from one of the first colonists of New Caledonia, who was given a large land-concession on the banks of the Dumbéa). David's references to his acquaintances were often accompanied by potted histories of their families' origins; I am sure that this was typical of the older, socially successful, Caldoches. The longer I stayed in New Caledonia, the more I became aware of historically significant family names, of social networks, and noticed that their bearers often held responsible positions in commerce and local government.

[This emphasis on kinship to establish social identity and hierarchy, is probably common to all relatively small and isolated places, including Pacific islands: for example, a Tahitian whom I met at the hostel told me that she was a Salmon, thinking that as I came from London I would recognise the name. [Alexander Salmon (1820-1866), former London banker and British Consul to Tahiti, confidant of the family of

Queen Pomare IV, married into a Tahitian high chiefship, a family still prominent today.]]

Le Wita (1994: 118), quoting Bourdieu, points out the importance of family connections to power élites, whose kin-based social network provides moral (and if necessary) financial support and influence, means for getting things done. This is why the rich have noticeably more relations than the petite bourgeoisie: they have more children (they can afford to) and they keep up even their more distant family connections: capital and influence circulate in solidarity. At the same time, this network allows élites to hide their activities and mannerisms from others, maintain their social exclusivity and deny or limit accessibility. While not wishing to exaggerate, (Nouméan society was hardly a reflection of the Parisian grande bourgeoisie), the Kanaks, in particular, often had little idea of how white society worked: they observed it from the outside but it was never quite clear to them what exactly was going on (Tjibaou, Missotte, Folco, Rives (1976:19) confirm this). [Erving Goffman's numerous discussions of public and private, front and back, symbolic "stage" management, show that this is a universal problem.] This militated against class and ethnic social integration. Rekab, for example, once got me into a long discussion as to whether French and English widows could remain in their husbands' villages after their husbands died. In Maré, he said, theoretically, they could not, and would have to return to their natal villages, unless perhaps their adult children were living in their husbands' villages (but this rule seemed to be honoured in the breach as well as the

observance). Rekab was very reluctant to accept that general European rules of this kind did not exist, except where the inheritance of property was concerned.

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THE HOSTELLERS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE KANAKS

A question nagged at me throughout my stay in the hostel. Why did none of the hostellers see the Kanaks as I did? [The few anthropologists and linguists I came across, in Paris and Nouméa, seemed to have a vision more approximating my own.] It was true that I had spent four and a half months in Maré before coming to the hostel, but, even so, there was a considerable gap in our perceptions. I saw a tightly-knit society which emphasised tradition, solidarity, and group activity, which controlled the young. Nearly everybody else seemed to ignore this, presumably because those who were aware of it found such social control authoritarian and unappealing. Those who had positive views of the Kanaks saw them as exotic, emotionally different. Others, less decided in their opinions, were often unnerved by them.

Triji and his Friends

The Kanaks who came to the hostel were very few. None of them fitted easily into traditional Kanak society. Even Roselène, the cleaner from Maré, divorced from her first, Kanak, husband, lived with her white boyfriend, who had decided to settle in New Caledonia after doing his military service there.

One of the people who came regularly to the hostel was Triji, a Kanak from Lifou. Triji had been coming to the hostel

for years. He would stay away for months, and then, with money to settle his unpaid bill from last time, suddenly return for a day or two. Triji worked outside Nouméa, in education (in the kitchens of the state boarding school at La Foa), so he could be accepted. Why Triji visited the hostel, I don't know - perhaps because it was cheap and easy for him to stay there, avoiding the social awkwardness of having to rely on the hospitality of friends whenever he came to Nouméa. He liked being in the atmosphere of the auberge, even when most of the people were strange to him, so that he made little, if any, conversation. Perhaps he was simply lonely. He liked meeting travellers, who gave him fresh perceptions on the wider world; although, occasionally, echoing Elisabeth, he would say something to the effect that the people who passed through the hostel were not as nice as they used to be, they had changed. Like Roselène, and several Kanaks I had met, he claimed to like Europeans but not the Caldoches (for a discussion of this see Vivier 1992:21.).

Triji's alleged preference for European ways meant that, as far as I knew, he rarely returned home to Lifou, despite being the youngest of four brothers and the darling of his widowed mother (who would sometimes meet him in Nouméa). He always claimed that this was because his family would denude him of all his savings and possessions, but there may well have been something else behind it, possibly connected with family expectations and his reluctance to marry. When I left, he was thirty; most Kanaks married earlier.

Triji's friends, who occasionally came to the hostel, had all, to some extent, rejected, or been rejected by, their Kanak origins. Either they were of mixed blood; or they had become urbanized; or caught up in the turmoil of local politics, as had Triji's distant cousins, the three Wedumel girls (connections of Lifou's Mayor Cono Hamu, and banned, with the rest of their family, from their natal district of Gaitcha). For one reason, or another, they had become acculturated. They were too close to the Métros, even to the Caldoches, to be fully integrated into traditional Kanak society.

Like Triji, who had been to Australia, and spoke a few words of English, and now longed for a job as steward on a cruise-ship, so that he could see all the other islands of the Pacific, all his friends wanted to travel. Claudine Wedumel was an air-stewardess with Air France: one of the first Kanak intake. She loved travelling and shopping. Justin worked in the Tourist Office of the Province Nord. But although they, and other young Kanaks that I knew, expressed a desire to travel and see the world, or had actually done so, none of them ever expressed this in terms of self-fulfilment, or of realizing one's potential. This is not to say that self-fulfilment - from the realizing of long-held ambitions - was absent, it was (presumably) not conceptualized, because not spoken about, in such terms.

These Kanaks were far closer to the workers than to the travellers, having a resigned approach to daily life and to the European work ethic. They had no discourse of self-fulfilment,

although occasionally they might mention a job that they would like to do. It was not they whom most of the hostellers were interested in, although people might chat with them and exchange information.

The Kanaks who came to the hostel were of only limited interest to the workers, who tended to socialize with other Europeans, and not exotic enough for the travellers Although rarely voiced openly, the Kanaks' views on proper behaviour, including sex and religion, were often bizarre or old fashioned by French standards.

Kanak sexual and religious mores

In their vague secularism, the hostellers differed markedly from most Kanaks, even the young ones (especially, in my experience, those Protestant Evangelicals who lived in Gileada). The Kanaks' religious convictions generally included firm beliefs in the Devil, evil spirits and witchcraft, subjects which they were not at all disposed to discuss with outsiders. This was partly because the Kanaks (rightly) feared that Europeans would laugh at them, and partly because they formed part of the secret, powerful, knowledge of "la coutume", including traces of complex pre-Christian beliefs and origin myths, which could only be spoken of by those with a right to do so (such as pastors and chiefs).

Even those Kanaks (very few) who went so far as to profess atheism or agnosticism displayed an uneasy respect for religion (for instance I once saw one of the Wedumel girls

refuse to listen to what was a mildly blasphemous joke). This contrast between Francophone travellers and Kanaks reflected much the same sort of attitude illustrated by Dean MacCannell in Empty meeting grounds (1992:141), when two French university students engaged an African student in conversation:

"The African had proudly proclaimed that his people were fully converted to Christianity whereupon the French replied with disgust that (sic) only proved their continued susceptibility to mumbo-jumbo. The African reacted with genuine shock, 'You don't believe in Jesus Christ our Lord? I thought only barbarians did not believe in God.' And the French students answered, laughing uproariously, 'Wrong, it is only the barbarians who do believe in God.' "

The largely Melanesian Evangelical churches, and their adherents, especially those of the older generation, had strict sexual mores and did not approve of illegitimate children. In the past, they would render a Kanak girl almost unmarriageable and so deprive her family of the full bride-price. [I once suggested to Triji that this was the original reason for gang-rape by enemy clans but he refused to discuss the matter with me.] In recent years, church attitudes have become more liberal in practice, if not in theory. Nevertheless, a child was often seen as something of a disgrace and an economic burden on the girl's parents (who often had to support both their daughter and the grand-child). The disgrace was doubled if the child were a half-caste from some itinerant European soldier

or sailor, and therefore unlikely to be legitimized by the future marriage of its parents. [My own conversations with Kanaks on this subject are confirmed by Dornoy (1984:61), who refers to unmarried mothers becoming tribal outcasts.] Although it is true that some Kanak tribes, like Gileada, were far stricter than others in their enforcement of traditional morality, this aspect of Kanak life was almost totally ignored by many Europeans. They seemed to assume that all Kanak sexual mores were as liberal as theirs. My own experience was that those thought to be of easy virtue were either of low status (if they remained within the tribe) or social rejects (who went to Nouméa).

The Hostellers' Reactions to the Kanaks

The people who were ambivalent towards the Kanaks were not travellers (whose attitudes were discussed earlier) but resident workers. The few short-term residents who worked in town to earn money, so as to move on to other countries within six months or so, often had little to do with Kanaks and no particular interest in them. Most of the hostellers who expressed ambivalence worked in the bush, "la brousse" or in the islands (teachers like Honorine, or the nurses, Diane and Julie) and just came to Nouméa from time to time, staying at the hostel. Often, they were indifferent to Kanak culture, except insofar that a few months or a few years spent working with Kanak pupils and patients formed part of their professional careers. Most teachers' or nurses' social lives were spent almost exclusively with other Europeans.

However, nearly all the teachers and nurses had stories to tell of the Kanaks' strange or threatening behaviour, towards them or towards people they knew. These included unreported and unproven murders disguised as boat or road accidents, and a revenge killing in which the blame was put on someone else. Several male hostellers were attacked by Kanaks in Nouméa and elsewhere (they always claimed that the attacks were completely unprovoked, and, sometimes, that the assailants had been drinking). Other stories included car-burnings, one of which was alleged to have taken place after a white schoolteacher at Canala hit or grabbed at one of his male pupils. Fritz, an Austrian hosteller and the boyfriend of a former French teacher at Canala, once told me of how a gendarme was killed at or near Canala during "les événements" by a Kanak he had gone fishing with. Fritz added that, when he and his girlfriend lived at Canala, he always knew that the men he was friendly with would be willing to kill him if the political situation changed.

Stoning was a common practice in New Caledonia. I heard several stories of stonings in Ouvéa and elsewhere, including one from a nurse at Houailou whose house was stoned one evening when she returned from the dispensary, in late 1991. One of the most notorious of "les événements" was the death of Simone Heurteaux, in April 1985, a popular pro-Kanak metropolitan teacher from the secondary school at Poindimié. Kanak adolescents were said to have caused her car to crash, and then killed her by stoning after she was injured.

People sometimes reacted strongly to these incidents. For example, Diane and Julie were horrified when children threw stones at them, when they visited Ouvéa. When Marie-Claire and I were in Ouvéa, a little girl attempted to throw one at the car in which we were travelling. I was not surprised, given that we were driving towards Gossanah. Once, in Maré, some children, playing, threw pebbles and then pretended to machine-gun me. [As far as I was concerned, incidents involving children were trivial, but this approach was not shared by everyone. This may have been because we had different cultural constructions of childhood, and, or, of the political situation existing in New Caledonia.] Nor was it just people who were stoned: many a dog limped around with broken bones, many a small bird or animal was killed by a slingshot.

Some teachers and nurses felt easier with the Kanaks than did others. Honorine, who worked at the Protestant school in Ouvéa, and came to the hostel every month or so, always said that she knew that, whatever happened, she would be safe: she had been on Ouvéa for several years and everybody knew her. Nicolas, who worked at Houailou and lived with Mariette, his Kanak girlfriend from Maré, felt relatively safe but not over-confident. Mariette was friendly with one local girl: but generally, as I myself experienced when I spent a few days with them, there was a suffocating atmosphere of secrecy, hostile stares and intimidation. We were all right, as long as we walked and drove on the main roads: but it was not safe to walk casually onto tribal land or to climb any of the louring hills which confined us within deep and narrow valleys.

Although teachers such as Honorine and Nicolas were friendlier with the Kanaks than were others, those who came to New Caledonia to work were generally unwilling to risk their professional or social status as members of the white, educated élite. Occasionally, teachers in some remote spot, in "la brousse" or in the islands, would obtain and smoke cannabis from some local youths. The bush telegraph, "radio des cocotiers", then ensured that they lost control of their classes. Not daring any severe punishments or reprimands, the teachers maintained a kind of desperate friendliness towards their pupils, hoping that nothing would get back to the parents and, or, school authorities. If it did, it was not just dismissal, but blacklisting that awaited them. Whether or not the police were involved, it was the end of their careers in New Caledonia.

It was not just the teachers and nurses from the bush who had reservations about the Kanaks. I met several Nouméa-dwelling Métros, including hostellers and ex-hostellers, who were ambivalent towards them.

There was a reason for this. They were frightened.

22

"LES ÉVÉNEMENTS" AND THEIR AFTERMATH: THE CALDOCHES' RELATIONSHIP WITH THE KANAKS

The 1988 Matignon Agreement had signalled the end of "les événements", but the antagonisms remained. The projected 1998 referendum, on the independence of New Caledonia, loomed over the horizon. As everybody knew, each ethnic and other group had only a limited amount of time in which to secure its position. Whoever won the referendum, certain people were bound to lose. If the Kanak pro-independentists won, any remaining whites faced the possibility of either expulsion, as had happened to the French secessionists of Espiritu Santo, or relegation to second-class citizenship, as had happened to the Indian Fijians. Rabuka's military coups of 1987 had terrified the Caldoches [1]. If the anti-independentists won, there were threats of further violence. Despite the attempts of Mitterand's socialist government to defuse the situation by liberal promises of financial aid, the fear and uncertainty remained.

The Caldoches' Reactions to the Kanaks

As already mentioned, many Kanaks claimed to prefer Métros to the Caldoches, although the Caldoches argued that this was

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1 Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Sitiveni Rabuka led two military coups in Fiji, on 14 May and 25 September 1987. These were provoked by the elections of April 1987, when, for the first time, ethnic Indians formed a majority in the Fijian government. They already outnumbered the indigenous Melanesian population. The coups were generally seen as a revendication of Melanesian rights, over those of the Indians.

false. The Caldoches claimed that they had a special rapport with the Kanaks: they understood them and knew how to treat them.

The Kanaks disputed this (see Tjibaou, Missotte, Folco and Rives, 1976:12-13; Vivier 1992:21). I was told that Jean-Marie Tjibaou agreed to the use of political violence only after the staging of the 1975 Melanesia 2000 festival, an assertion of Kanak culture which the Caldoches treated with contempt, by staying away, leaving only Métros as spectators: the Kanaks took this as a deliberate insult. [This was despite Tjibaou's and others' (1976:38) use of local press reports that 50,000 people, nearly one-third of the population, attended the festival over four days. It is not said how these figures were arrived at.]

But even if the Caldoches did understand the Kanaks, "les événements", with arson, cattle-killing, murders, rapes, and hostage-taking, had confirmed their worst fears. Despite a century of French colonialism, the Kanaks were still dangerous.

The psychological impact upon the Caldoches was enormous. Not only did "les événements" arouse memories of the revolts of 1878, led by the chief Atai, and of 1917, led by the chiefs Doui Phillippe Bouarate and Noel nea ma Pwatiba, they destroyed their carefully constructed myth of friendship with the Kanaks. No longer could anyone pretend that they lived together in a benevolent social apartheid, despite the

Caldoches' grabbing of the Kanaks' lands and resources. No longer could they brush aside injustice. What really shook them was the reminder that Melanesian hostilities in New Caledonia were cyclical, hostilities continuing, with periods of quiesence, until the righting of original wrongs. Their Kanak neighbours, written off as peaceable harmless inferiors, still resented the ills done to them years ago, and were determined to assert their rights in ways which the Caldoches considered barbaric. The systematic oppression of the Kanaks, by the Caldoches and by representatives of the French state, was ignored. [An example of which was the "corvée" [2], forced labour systematised under the Code de l'Indigenat, which determined the legal status of Kanaks from 1887 to 1946.] As far as the Caldoches were concerned, the Kanaks had reverted to savagery.

Tales of Violence

The result of all this was that anyone staying more than a few

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2 I am not, of course, arguing that such measures were particularly oppressive within the colonial context or confined to French colonialism (see below). What I am saying is that this system was both resented by the Kanaks at the time and the memory of it continues to be resented today. The corvée is one of those aspects of colonial oppression which Kanaks mention, for whatever purpose, to non-Caledonian visitors.

In Papua New Guinea, for example, forced native labour occurred both under the German administration of 1884-1914, and, to a lesser extent, the Australian administration of 1914-1975. Although primarily intended for the benefit of the administration, either in lieu of taxation, or as a means of carrying out road-, bridge-building, and other tasks, it was also seen as a means of helping and civilizing the natives. Reed quotes from the Rabaul Times of 22 March 1922:

"The natives of New Caledonia are a better type than the natives of this Territory, and it is work that they have to thank for their condition. As soon as the natives here are made to work, the healthier they will be..."(Stephen Winsor Reed, The Making of Modern New Guinea 1943:179; for further details see Chapters IV and V; also see Lucy Philip Mair Australia in New Guinea 1948:121.)

weeks in New Caledonia began to hear stories concerning either "les événements" or the Kanaks in particular. For example, one young Indonesian Caldoche told me of their Kanak neighbours' attempted poisonings of his father, while his family were living in Houailou (during "les événements" they moved elsewhere). Lucien said to me that people in rural France told similar stories, of attempted and undetected murders, while other anthropologists told me that the Kanaks were always talking about sorcery and poisonings, but that they doubted whether people actually did it. Whether they did or not, such stories show the fears and general inter-ethnic paranoia generated in small communities during "les événements".]

Very many of these incidents went unreported at the time, either because it was thought that the overstretched police would take no action or because the events were considered shameful for the victims, so it is difficult to know exactly what happened. Rapes, in particular, are said to have gone unreported, as were incidents such as stoning, and the maiming of cattle. When I visited the west coast, it revealed, every so often, burnt-out, derelict, farm buildings and houses.

Other, more recent stories, contemporaneous with my stay in New Caldonia, included hut-, and car-burning, and violent gang-rape among Kanaks. [The only stories I heard of the alleged rapes of European women I knew to be false, third-party, exaggerations of minor incidents which only proved the omnipresence of gossip throughout the territory. I quickly

learnt never to take a story at its face value, while at the same time accepting that there was no smoke without fire. The only story I heard alleging the anal rape of European men had political overtones.]

Virtually none of these stories appeared in Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes: or, if they did, they were often sanitised. The perpetrators were rarely recognized, or caught, and no-one wished to inflame already difficult situations. One noticeable aspect was that the alleged Kanak perpetrators had often had seemingly friendly relations with the victims until the events occurred, so their behaviour was felt to be a betrayal. [Europeans today tend to generate moral obligations from friendship, an attitude grounded in political peace, taking no account of cyclical hostilities or of the differing group and other loyalties involved in civil or guerrilla war.]

French and other tourists visiting Ouvéa, Houailou, or some other rural areas (especially on the west coast) were only tolerated, and never appeared completely safe. [This was made clear to me by the uneasy atmosphere during the few days I spent in Houailou and Ouvéa.] Stones might be thrown at their vehicles, or insults scratched upon them. They were sometimes stoned themselves, by children. Often there was tension in the air, at any mixed-race encounter whose purpose was not immediately and specifically defined. This sometimes happened in Nouméa, as well as elsewhere.

For instance, stonings, "caillassages", were quite

frequent in several areas: taxi-drivers would often refuse to go to certain areas of Nouméa, such as Montravel or Cité Pierre Lenquette, or to the Mission de Saint-Louis, for fear of damage to their vehicles. Other incidents such as the burning of Prisunic, in March 1992, raised ripples of alarm.

"La Horde Sauvage"

The 1992 burning of Prisunic-Barrau was Nouméa's most spectacular example of public disorder during my time in New Caledonia. It began about three in the morning of Saturday 14 March - Elisabeth and Francis awoke and were able to watch it from their house overlooking the town. I, like most of the hostellers, slept through it, and had to gather up bits and pieces of information over the next few days.

According to Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes (Monday 16 March 1992), the savage hord, "La horde sauvage" (lead title, cover page) had been evicted from a night-club known as the Bus-Palladium. Consisting mostly of young Kanaks (with possibly, some other unspecified ethnic groups), fighting drunk, it started to cause trouble outside, at which point the club was closed.

Somebody threw a Molotov cocktail, made of a petrol-filled mineral water bottle stuffed with a flaming T-shirt, against its walls. The police appeared, to retreat under a hail of stones.

Meanwhile, most of the crowd, now well over a hundred,

had turned towards Place des Cocotiers. Some tried forcing the gates of the town-hall while others levered the security grilles off Prisunic-Barrau. The entering of Prisunic, its resultant sacking; the looting of Caldis Hi-Fi on the opposite side of the square; the setting alight of Prisunic and of various franchised boutiques on the top floor of the centre commercial Barrau; the retreat of the police and of the fire-brigade under hails of stones: all these caused a scandal whose reverberations were felt for months and which was discussed for weeks afterwards.

The police, a newspaper vendor told me significantly, had their orders. He tapped the side of his nose. What were needed were police dogs ... with those they could have cleared the crowd in ten minutes. Much the same was repeated in Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes (which sold out on the Monday morning, unique in my experience). An editorial blamed the looting on the prevalence of squats around Nouméa, the young, unqualified, impoverished people attracted to the town from the bush: above all on the lack of political will which had allowed Place des Cocotiers to become a night-time haven for drunks and cannabis-smokers, while the rest of the town went dead [3].

The authorities responded to the burning of Prisunic by

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3 The unnatural calm of Nouméa at night had been one of the first things that struck me when I arrived in New Caledonia: at 7 pm, not a shop, not a café, was open, everything was closed. I was told that this was a result of the riots and various other incidents of "les événements": Nouméa had changed, people had become too frightened to go out in the evening. By the time I left, two years later, the town was a little more animated.

indemnifying the salaries of nearly two hundred employees of the Barrau centre; by threatening heavy prison sentences to those found responsible; by closing down the Bus-Palladium (one of whose bouncers said that if it and similar establishments were closed, their customers would go and smash all the windows in the terrace-café of the Hotel Le Paris, next to the Hickson City cinema); and by closing, or threatening to close, various establishments suspected of illegal sales of alcohol.

A hand-out protesting against these measures, and calling for shopkeepers to gather for a demonstration at Place des Cocotiers on 14 May 1992, accused the authorities of political cowardice in refusing to accept responsibility for the causes of the riot, being content to let Nouméa rot, its social and economic life disintegrate through paranoia and false impressions of danger, rather than take any preventative action.

Accurate as these charges were, little seemed to change in Place des Cocotiers. The ruins of Prisunic smoked thinly and sadly for a couple of days until it was safe for the fire-brigade to go in. Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes (16 March 1992) lamented [4]:

" ... a page of the territory's history has disappeared.

The 'old lady' of Nouméa was the store where the

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4 " ... c'est une page de l'histoire du Territoire qui disparaît.

La 'vieille dame' de Nouméa etait le magasin des broussards qui s'y ravitaillent. Depuis des années, on passait sa comande chez Barrau. Et certains, à l'annonce du sinistre, déclarait: 'Mais où va-t-on faire maintenant nos commissions?' "

'broussards' bought their food supplies. For years, one placed one's orders at Barrau. And some people, hearing the news of the disaster, declared: "But now, where are we going to do our shopping?' "

The shock-waves were enormous. Uncomfortably similar to "les événements", representing a real commercial loss to all the store's suppliers, it generated a buzz of rumour to which only veiled references appeared in the local press. The rumours were that Jacques Barrau, one of the leading figures of the territory, had burnt it down so as to gain the insurance. Prisunic had been losing out to its rival, Ballande. Barrau had paid certain young thugs, perhaps from the notorious tribe of Saint-Louis, to stir up trouble and then burn it for him. How else could people suddenly produce concealed bottles of petrol, why else would so many fires have been systematically lit throughout the store?

None of these rumours were ever published as such. But every so often, Jacques Barrau would state publicly that his affairs were and had been on a sound financial footing, despite any scurrilous suggestions to the contrary.

As for the perpetrators, the police announced that they had caught some of those responsible, including minors and women, followed by a deafening silence. No trial, on major charges, took place while I was in New Caledonia. Twenty years had been mentioned as a possible sentence for any ring-leaders. A few hostellers remarked on this, horrified. Twenty

years! It was a lot, wasn't it - just for a bit of pilfering.

A Sea of Troubles

Yet it was not so much particular incidents that frightened people, as the atmosphere in certain places, and the accumulation of negative information.

Stories of European violence were far fewer, and told to me not by Kanaks but by Métros. They included that of some rich Caldoches, in the presence of a Métro doctor, a guest on board their yacht, deliberately ramming and sinking a small Kanak fishing boat: and then laughing, sailing away, leaving the Kanaks to swim to shore (risking sharks and drowning) as best they could. Europeans who had been in Nouméa during "les événements" hinted at the orchestration of violence by some of New Caledonia's most wealthy and prominent citizens.

One consequence of this was that those people who had come to New Caledonia to work were often undecided as to how long they should stay. Those on short-term contracts rarely had plans to renew them. Those who had worthwhile jobs, or had sunk their savings into their new lives, were often extremely anxious. They could just about afford a house, or an apartment, but should they risk it? Surely it would be safer to live in a boat, as many people did, and just hire a mooring at the marina? If necessary, a boat could always be sailed elsewhere, even to Australia or New Zealand. And surely, it would be easier to sell.

PART 5

CONCLUSIONS

23

CULTURAL POLITICS

Urbanization and Globalization

Urbanization and globalization are not unique to the twentieth century but throughout it have been increasing at an exponential rate. The significance of population movements from the country to the cities, of individuals' increased international mobility, and the extent to which individual nations lock into the world trade system, has been hotly debated. Hannerz, Robertson and others argue that these increasingly complex social and economic interactions simultaneously produce cultural homogeneity and cultural particularism; but that this two ways trend is unequal, moving slowly but inescapably towards homogeneity, from the centre to the periphery.

Fardon, Howell, and others dispute this, pointing out that such arguments assume the existence of bounded and authentic cultures. The real question, they claim, is not one of alienation and displacement but of hybridization. To what extent are cultural changes taking place and how profound are they? Are these new goods and knowledge being used to plug existing cultural gaps (Signe Howell "Whose knowledge and whose power?" (1995:165)? If so, does this undermine ideas of cultural coherence and of coherent systems of knowledge? Some see the very idea of integral cultures as an illusion. Eric Wolf and Immanuel Wallerstein, cited in Roland Robertson's Globalization (1992: 30), attribute it to the nineteenth century

division of knowledge and creation of the social sciences, while others point to its rôle in the symbolic and ritualistic reinforcement of empire and nation. The twentieth century nostalgia for the past is partly a result of this, harking back to the last century's evolutionary hypotheses and emphasis on historical knowledge. It gives an impression of culture as a hereditary possession, liable to be lost or damaged if left too long unattended (Richard Fardon, "Introduction: counterworks", (1995: 7-9)).

It is a truism that the division of labour in complex societies results in the unequal distribution of knowledge, making it problematic that there should be common cultural cores. Without dwelling on the riddle of how culture is acquired but persists over time, this leads on to Hannerz's question of how individuals (in the city) get meaning from their surroundings (1980: 281-282). This applies to globalization as much as to urbanization, but I shall discuss it with reference to Nouméa.

Nouméa, in the early 1990s,was more like a dull provincial town than a vibrant cosmopolitan city. Although there may have been Kanaks who felt completely lost and disorientated within it, the majority of them were accustomed to trips to and from the town to the tribal village. This was partly because communications and transport (including aeroplanes), although expensive, were far more frequent and easily available than they had been in the past. For young people and children, there were numerous scholastic and

training trips and exchanges. All this built up a sense of familiarity. Nearly every Kanak knew somebody who worked and lived, or had worked and lived, in or around Nouméa. It is true that certain aspects of city life, such as the levelling of feeling and attitude produced by the money economy, emphasis on clock-time and other forms of punctuality and precision, contrast with life in the countryside (Simmel, cited in Urry 1995:8). However, although the rural Kanaks were confronted with one set of meanings and lifestyle at home, and another in Nouméa, the rupture was not normally so great as to cause existential crises.

Despite my having been told by Guy that Jemes knew nothing of Kanak life, because he had grown up in Nouméa (an example of romantic essentialism), it seemed to me that the Loyalty Islanders and others whom I met were quite capable of dealing with different sets of meanings in different contexts, even though their depth of customary knowledge may have been less than in the past. [This pragmatism and adaptability among the Loyalty Islanders is shown by their histories of trade, labour contracts, and missionization. It recalls McDonald's (1989) argument that the Bretons are perfectly capable of simultaneously dealing with two languages, French and Breton, and multiple sets of meanings, without being traumatized in the process.]

Hannerz's famous description of "The global ecumene as a network of networks" (1992) can be recast in primarily economic terms as the production and consumption of ideas,

goods and services. These are exported and imported in five main ways: first, as material goods; second, through financial, information, and other electronic technology based services; third, through the ideas and images disseminated through the media, especially television; fourth, through education; fifth, through encounters with unlike others, particularly tourists. Access to goods depends not just on individual wealth but also on national and regional infrastructure, including storage facilities and forms of transport. Access to ideas is far less limited, being spread principally through the media. The result is that even the poorest, most isolated and illiterate people, provided they have some access to a radio or television, have a far clearer idea of the nature and extent of what they lack in material terms and social opportunities than had previous generations. This knowledge is increased by education and by encounters with seemingly rich strangers and, or, foreigners, particularly tourists.

Globalization, like tourism, is seen as both a cause and product of modernity but the unequal integration of countries into the world system not only helps to retain and privilege local goods and meanings over imported ones, it also hinders further integration. New Caledonia, as shown in earlier chapters, was essentially insular and resistant to modernity, political and economic factors making her more concerned with France and her Pacific neighbours than with the rest of the world. Within the territory, the periphery was unevenly integrated with the centre, the country and small towns with the capital port of Nouméa. In terms of goods and services,

Ouvéa was to Maré as Maré was to Lifou; as Lifou was to Nouméa, so Nouméa was to Sydney.

The import of goods and prestigious frozen, tinned, and dry foodstuffs from France and Australia (to supplement the limited amount of food manufacture in New Caledonia) resulted in periodic shortages as shops awaited the next cargo boat or aeroplane. This was repeated as items were exported from Nouméa to the hinterland and the islands. A lack of refrigerated transport vans meant that Nouméa was a gourmet's paradise compared to the rest of the territory. It also had the greatest concentration of material goods.

The effects of visiting Nouméa, television, education and tourism, were to intensify the Kanaks' awareness of the positional economy, in which people have to consume in order to maintain their social status: trapping the impoverished Kanaks at the bottom of the heap. As already stated, activities such as tourism seemed to me likely to promote resentment rather than international understanding (also see Dann 1993: 102), which some people, such as Krzystof Przclawski ("Tourism as the subject of interdisciplinary research" 1993: 17-19) hopefully advocate as a by-product of globalization. Very often, there is considerable misinterpretation of the tourist's, or any stranger's, wealth and social standing: for example, Rekab's daughter Kezia loved watching "Dynasty" on television: one day, as the credits rolled and the palatial Colby mansion came into view, she asked if I lived in a house like that! These misinterpretations are fuelled by the fact that the

Kanaks, like the tradition-prizing Hawaiians of Miloli'i village, "have a concerted practice of endo-sociality", travelling in groups to stay with other Kanaks, and not normally associating with tourists or other ethnic groups (Kajsa Ekholm-Friedman and Jonathan Friedman in "Global complexity and everyday life" (1995: 161).

Such reinforcement of the positional economy alters existing social relationships: for example, as Alceste indignantly told me, there was a nasty attitude, "une vilaine mentalité", abroad in Maré, now that chest freezers had become more widespread. Instead of people sharing the pigs they slaughtered, or the fish they caught, with their families and neighbours in the traditional manner, they were turning into "petits colons noirs" who hid them in the freezer and kept them for themselves: as people already did in Lifou and Ouvéa.

The positional economy results in winners and losers, encouraging people who can ill afford it to spend money on luxury status goods rather than essentials. The Loyalty Islanders' reliance on cargo boats, with their limited space, plus the desire to maximize profits, meant that status goods were made available in shops while other, more useful items were crowded out. It is true that an expensive television set and accompanying video recorder seen in a comparatively poor and uncomfortable rural household is a source of immense pleasure and prestige to the family concerned and to the neighbourhood children, even when every member of the family continues to sleep on a cement floor. Yet generally speaking, I

always noticed, and heard some people complain, about how few useful items and material for building and other DIY work were available in Maré's (few) shops, to make life comfortable; how little intermediate technology of any kind there was, leaving people a choice of either the most modern and expensive piece of imported equipment available (liable to break down, needing repairs that might be available in Nouméa, if at all) or nothing at all. It is easy to say that most Kanaks have not traditionally had exactly the same wants and aspirations as Europeans, especially as regards domestic comfort: on the other hand, inexpensive comforts were not widely available, so it is difficult to judge.

Although I have generally argued in favour of local meaning and cultural resistance to European lifestyles, I think it would be wrong to underestimate the impact of French secular and material culture on the Kanak world. Howell (195: 171) argues forcibly for the continuation of small-scale societies in Oceania and elsewhere, and it is true, as Ley wrote (cited in Shields 1991: 16), that to outsiders there always seems to be a recognizable, distinct relation between geographical places and their inhabitants.

The academic deconstruction of cultural reifications and their claimed authenticities does not mean that nothing cultural exists; it is partly a question of definition. The problem is that whatever does exist is under assault from a tide of information and material goods that will irrevocably alter Kanak culture as it does so. Although exposed to

European culture from first contact, Kanak culture survived, to an extent, because of people's resistance, the poor conditions of material existence, and European neglect. This is now changing.

The roots of Kanak culture were and are the secret myths and legends surrounding the origins of clans and of customary practice, "la coutume", all of which were manifested in social organization, marriage, death and other practices. Both social organization and practices, and secret knowledge, are now, to a certain degree, losing their original meanings. This is not to say that they will not continue in modified form but the power and rationale behind them is likely to be a political one in which Kanaks primarily use their behaviour and beliefs to distinguish themselves from other people. Secret knowledge, for example, continues but no longer serves the same functions as previously.

Mary Douglas implies, in Purity and Danger (1984: 69), that the distinct nature and integrity of small-scale societies depends on shared meanings, created by having a single field of symbolic action, obtained through repeated use of the same symbols in different contexts. Both Douglas (1984: 88-91) and Brunton (cited in James F. Weiner, " 'Bad Aboriginal' anthropology", 1997: 5-7) claim that it is wrong to attribute too great an intellectual systematization and coherence to cultural beliefs. Yet in simple societies such knowledge is still much more evenly distributed and publicly agreed upon than in complex ones, however much individuals may argue

about certain details (particularly when such details are used to back up political and other claims). I am not, however, implying that Kanak secret knowledge is about to disappear completely under the impact of secular French rationalism: especially given the French tolerance of seemingly irrational practices such as crystal-gazing, fortune-telling, etcetera (as mentioned in Chapter 12 on "The Travellers"). The Kanak healer, "le guérisseur", remains a popular recourse among nearly all Caledonians, when they suspect that illnesses not amenable to Western medicine have their true origin in Kanak sorcery and taboo-breaking, "le boucan".

Factionalism and Discord

Alfred Gell once said to me that New Caledonia's culture was thin, but its politics were thick. Certainly, in the early nineteen-nineties, New Caledonia was a highly politicized society riven by factionalism and discord, with various groups trying to safeguard and improve their economic and political positions before the 1998 referendum on moves towards independence. Those involved in this factionalism were, in a sense, playing a game which was difficult for non-players to judge. The degree of tension between Caldoches and Kanaks was, for example, often mitigated by a certain complicity and understanding, which was missing from their relations with outsiders. In the same way, Kanaks usually displayed a common cultural front towards Europeans, while bitterly disputing between themselves.

Kanak society, over the last one hundred and fifty years, has

been disrupted by colonialism, so it is impossible to assess with any accuracy how violent pre-contact society was. It is certainly possible to analyze "les événements" as part of a cultural continuum, in which young men are warriors while older men are peace-makers. It seems to me that there is a correspondence between the Kanak struggle for independence and Simon Harrison's description of warfare in Melanesia (Papua New Guinea):

"War, and the ritual ethic of war, were means used purposefully by men to construct a political identity for their community in the first place, not just as a physical population free from extermination, but more basically as a conceptual entity free from the normative claims of outsiders. What they were trying to do in war and ritual was not simply use power against outsiders and act against them at the level of force, but also to act ideologically against that perpetual moral accountability to outsiders which implicitly threatened the idea of the community as apolitical entity. they fought and fostered war ... not because they lacked normative ties but precisely because they had such ties and could only define themselves as a polity by acting collectively to overcome and transcend them." [The Mask of War (1993:150).]

Applying these words to the Kanaks, normative ties can be seen as those resulting from the practicalities of two communities living in proximity, even if one is the victor and the other the vanquished. Paul Rabinow, in "Representations are Social Facts" (1986: 259, 260), refers to Foucault's "subjection", in pointing out that colonial states function only

with the complicity of the subjugated: "That dimension of power relations is where the identity of individuals is at stake and where order in its broadest meaning takes form. This is the realm in which culture and power are most closely intertwined." The acquiesence of the Kanaks was not so much a response to a superior force as to superior technology (which equals knowledge and power). Powerful people should be treated with respect and caution. It was this technical superiority that enabled the French to justify their occupation of New Caledonia, on the grounds that its existing inhabitants were living in the Stone Age (a recurrent theme in New Caledonia, where nineteenth-century evolutionary principles were and still are used to bolster white superiority). Such attitudes ignore an obvious generalization: that if there is no particular need for certain types of technology, they are unlikely to be developed.

Kanak behaviour and moral obligations towards outsiders are also expressed in traditional views of hospitality towards strangers (who could equally be treated with hostility) and with the religious teachings brought to them by foreign missionaries, now incorporated, especially in the Loyalties, into "la coutume". I suggest that Kanak attitudes towards outsiders swing between hostility and hospitality, depending on context, and that one is not seen as more binding than another.

That warfare is a continuation of politics by other means, and vice-versa, has been repeated throughout the ages,

from Sun Tzu to Clausewitz. Nevertheless, the public presentation of culture, as a means of psychological warfare, has entered New Caledonia's political arena.

The political struggle between pro-independence Kanaks and anti-independence Caldoches was presented to the French and world public in cultural forms which were often as much French as Melanesian. This reflected the ways in which indigenous peoples play with Western symbols, in organizing the presentation of their cultures to the outside world (as already shown by Musu the Polynesian artist: what Michael M. J. Fischer calls "the indirection of cultural dynamics" in "Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory" (1986: 207)). It demonstrated both the sophistication of the Kanak leaders and their French sympathizers, in what were and are apparently standard forms of French Press presentation. Turkle (1975: 79-80, 92-96) discussing the events of May 1968, argues that French political identity is unstable, unlike French cultural identity, which is manifested in history, civilization and practice. This political instability requires that great political dramas be legitimized by being re-enacted in the style of their predecessors, notably the French Revolution of 1789. [Karl Marx, in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", (1852) pointed out that the French revolutionaries appropriated both costumes and symbols from the Roman Empire: Marx, cited in Fischer 1986: 207-208.]

So the same symbols appear again and again: black and red flags, barricades, graffiti referring to the past: from May

1968 back to 1789. The Kanak struggle for independence, initially led by Nidoish Naisseline who spent May 1968 in Paris, used all these symbols (examples of what Ulf Hannerz, in "Notes on the Global Ecumene" (1989: 71-73) calls the transfer of formal symbol systems between cultures). The red and black flags of anarchy were replaced by the multicoloured flag of Kanaky; the barricades went up, cutting off road access to Kanak rural areas: in Nouméa, riots, demonstrations and sit-ins took place in Place des Cocotiers and elsewhere, and were broken up, often brutally, by the police. Jean-Marie Tjibaou, photographed hand on heart, posed nobly by the flag of Kanaky, looking like a great leader, almost a second de Gaulle, bringing peace to New Caledonia as de Gaulle brought peace to Algeria (followed by the departure and ever-lasting bitterness of the pieds-noirs).

It is a truism to say that such cultural mishmashes result in cultural mismatches of French and Kanak terms of reference. Still, the Kanak use of French political symbols helped bring about recognition of their cause, culminating in the Matignon Agreement of 1988.

After the 1988 Matignon Agreement, the political struggle expanded into a cultural one. The two sides became symbolically represented by the ADCK and the SEHN, even though their functions were different. One was a government funded cultural agency and the other a local history society.

My one brief encounter with the SEHN, which had nothing

(see below)
to do with David, confirmed my belief in the accuracy of what was later said to me, that some of the people in it were dangerous. So too, I thought, were some of the people employed by the ADCK. Both the ADCK and the SEHN contained a fair number of political activists: the danger was the orchestration of political violence. My impression was that both political sides, pro- and anti- independence, had stopped using violence for the time being but were ready to resume it whenever they considered it necessary.

The ADCK promoted Kanak culture, or, at least, certain acceptable accessible secular aspects of it, in a manner designed to win the allegiance of the Kanak population for the independence struggle, while reassuring the rest of the population, and if possible, the French, of the Kanaks' essential good nature. As such, the ADCK emphasised the present rather than the past, and promoted certain creative activities, such as art, drama, music, and literature, which had little to do with traditional Kanak society but had very high prestige in the western world.

The ADCK's ideological opposite, the SEHN, concentrated on the past, rather than the present, and promoted a Eurocentric approach to New Caledonia's history and culture. Kanak culture was almost totally ignored, and, when it was not, was treated with paternalism. David, whose moral integrity I admired despite disagreeing with his politics, was not only a member of the SEHN but also connected with other local literary and historical publications. These concentrated

on European activity in New Caledonia, treating Kanak culture as both a charming curiosity doomed to extinction and an essential element of New Caledonian cultural identity. Shields (1991: 5, 276) cites Edward Said, Stallybrook, White, and others to point out that there is a political imperative to reject and eliminate the fascinating but debasing "low": "The social "Other" of the marginal and of low culture is despised and reviled in the official discourse of dominant culture and central power while at the same time being constitutive of the imaginary and emotional repertoires of that dominant culture."

Like virtually every well-intentioned European I came across, Métros and Caldoches alike, David saw the Kanaks as a social problem, a group of people who should be left to develop at their own pace, but for whom more job and educational efforts should be made so that they could integrate more easily. Very few Europeans, of any political persuasion, felt that Kanak culture was as important as French, or that the inculcation of French language and culture was ultimately anything but good. The Kanaks' opinions varied, although Marie-Adèle Néchéro-Jorédié of the EPK (Ecole Populaire Kanak) radical schooling movement infuriated both the French and the Caledonians by announcing that English, rather than French, would be given linguistic priority.

People in New Caledonia were often Anglophobic, and this was exacerbated by the independence movement's efforts to gain moral and other support from Anglophone Pacific countries (and from Libya, and groups such as the IRA). In

April 1993, the British reggae band "Steel Pulse" gave a series of concerts in New Caledonia, causing outrage when the lead singer, David Hins, yelled "Independence for Kanaky" from the stage, leading to demands that he be deported.

In my opinion, this Anglophobia was related to post-war mass immigration and the nickel boom, and was encouraged by French officials, rather than being inherent in the Kanaks and Caledonians. Most of them still had fond folk memories of the previously unimaginable excitement and prosperity brought by the Allied Forces in the Second World War, and nearly all of them longed to visit Australia. At the same time, there was a generalized distrust, especially by the Métros.
Widely-held beliefs included the Anglophone countries wish to end the use of the French language in the Pacific, and Australia's encouragement of Kanak independence so that she could invade as soon as the French left. Exaggerated as these fears were (Australia may well have been interested in the economic penetration of New Caledonia's markets but hardly threatened an invasion), they pointed towards the real problem, French nuclear testing in the Pacific.

French Nuclear Testing in the Pacific

The numerous protests made by Pacific and other countries against French nuclear testing are well-known. Suffice it to say that New Caledonia was seen as intrinsically linked with French sovereignty in Polynesia and the tests on Mururoa atoll. The independence of New Caledonia would stimulate not just demands for the independence of Tahiti and other Pacific

islands, but possible compensation claims, demands for economic restructuring, and attempts to end any further nuclear tests. It might also encourage separatist movements in Corsica, the Basque country, and elsewhere, as well as independence movements, and or demands for greater financial support, in French possessions such as La Réunion and Guadeloupe.

Despite changes of government, nuclear tests were seen as intrinsic to and an affirmation of, France's power and status in the world. In 1992, President Mitterand announced the tests' temporary cessation: in June 1995 President Chirac announced their limited resumption. As Oscar Temaru, leader of the Tahitian independence party Tavini Huiraatira, said in an interview with the Kanak journalist Nicole Waia ("L'Indépendance de la Polynésie est inéluctable", Combat Ouvrier 25 April 1993), the economic "Progress Pact", "Pacte de Progrès" accompanying the cessation of nuclear testing, was like meat given to pigs: "c'est de la viande donnée aux cochons". The pigs were still destined for the table, however well treated they might be. France would stop and start nuclear testing at will, for she considered it to be a matter of sovereignty.

During the Cold War, for some forty years after the end of the Second World War, the Pacific was seen as an American lake. US nuclear submarines and allied island bases offset the massive Soviet presence and land-based missiles in Eurasia. The Soviet Pacific fleet was based at Vladivostok. French

nuclear submarines were said to be present in Nouméa, up to and including the nineteen-nineties.

It has always been easy to argue that the retention of New Caledonia is part of France's vital economic and strategic interests. Before the Second World War, it was a trade, re-provisioning and refuelling, stop for steam and sailing ships. Nickel was (and remains) essential for industry and armaments: even copra was used in the manufacture of nitro-glycerine. Today there remain New Caledonia's rich mineral resources and the distant possibilities of future exploitation of polymetallic nodes on the sea-bed. The retention of New Caledonia and French Polynesia should also enable France to grasp at any opportunities that might be offered by the fast-growing economies of the Pacific Rim.

The series of nuclear tests announced by President Chirac proved to be the last, as the South Pacific is now a nuclear-free zone. In March 1996, France, Britain and the USA signed three protocols to the 1985 Treaty of Rarotonga, intended to boost the on-going negotiations for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. French Polynesia and New Caledonia may now be given their independence without its materially affecting France's prestige, before the likely long-term damage to Mururoa atoll allows radioactive substances to seep into the surrounding ocean. But few people would bet on it. The harsh truth is that the efforts of both the independentist Kanaks and the anti-independentist Caldoches, as described in this thesis, are probably irrelevant. The

ultimate fate of New Caledonia, notwithstanding the 1998 referendum, will be decided, in Paris, by political and economic considerations that will have little to do with the wishes of its people.

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CONCLUSIONS

Throughout my time in the hostel, I had one overriding interest: to return to Maré and expunge the disgrace of having left the field while, at the same time, so arranging matters that any disagreements would be smoothed over, harmony would reign, and nobody would try to pressurize me. This childish fantasy was compounded by emotional distress. Rekab's brother and sister-in-law, and other members of his family, had been so hospitable to me that I had to find a way of restoring good relations. This belief in a happy return came from my various misinterpretations of what had been going on: it was only much later, as I acquired a better understanding of Kanak and Caledonian society, that I saw how unlikely such an outcome would be.

The problem, I was almost convinced, was a minor one. Rekab, for some reason, refused to listen to me. He misunderstood why I had come to Maré. The solution was for somebody to explain it to him, somebody to whom he could listen, whom he could trust.

Given the project, and Rekab's political connections, I could hardly leave Maré, then begin fieldwork somewhere else. Rekab had received an unspecified sum for lodging me (I made no attempt to find out the exact details, mindful of the warnings I had been given in Paris): I had to make some return. A thesis, a book, was not what the Cultural Committee saw as

useful, or wanted, but it was the only thing which I was able to give. What use was a book written in English, "Un livre? En anglais? A quoi ça sert?", I overheard one man indignantly exclaim. Exactly what was wanted was never made clear to me, but Rekab's desire for videos was probably a general one.

My main problem was finance. I wanted my funding to continue so that I could return to Maré and complete my fieldwork: but at the same time, I had to ensure that I would have no more difficulties with the Cultural Committee. With all these considerations in mind, I concentrated my efforts on persuading Jemes at the Bureau to speak to Rekab. I had, earlier, shortly after I arrived in New Caledonia, asked Jemes to explain my presence to him. Jemes had agreed. Rekab, however, repeated that Jemes had never said anything to him, whenever I asked if they had spoken yet.

Technically, he was telling the truth, as Jemes had tried to speak to him but Rekab had refused to listen.

Some eighteen months later, as already stated, I discovered that Jemes had indeed mentioned me, shortly after my arrival: and that Rekab had told him to keep quiet, as he, Rekab knew exactly why I was there and what I was doing, as the President had spoken. I also found out that Jemes and Rekab's family had never got on, despite being first cousins.

But initially, I knew none of this. All I knew was that Rekab and the Cultural Committee were making plans for me

without consulting me; and that there had been some unpleasant episodes with the ethnomusicologist and Catherine.

After abandoning my hopes of getting Jemes to do anything, I visited Maré and saw Emmanuel, then eventually managed to get to see the President. To each of these people, I recounted what had happened. With each, I exerted myself to be a model of tact. Everyone, I said, lost their temper occasionally. No one could deny Rekab's excellent qualities. It was just that attempting to hit me, threatening to blind me, yelling, and refusing to consult me over where I was going to live, were not acceptable. Eager as I was at the prospect of being able to work in co-operation with the Cultural Committee, there was nevertheless some misunderstanding about my reasons for being in Maré. Perhaps someone could speak to Rekab, to clear things up?

This persistent nagging ultimately paid off, after I spoke to a journalist from Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes, who rang the President's secretary. Some ten months after I left Maré, the President asked Jemes to speak to Rekab, who said that he had misunderstood. After this, I returned to Gileada for short visits, staying with the village chief Jese and his wife, exchanging pleasantries with Rekab whenever contact was unavoidable. But the atmosphere sometimes became a little strained.

It was only gradually that I discovered what had been going on.

First, the Cultural Committee had expected the return of Catherine. When she failed to appear, they agreed that the next researcher to arrive on the island, whoever he or she might be, would spend periods of three months living in succession with various members of the Cultural Committee, in different parts of Maré. They assumed that Catherine had been recruited to work for them by the provincial government, under the aegis of the President, and that the next person to arrive would be the same. Nobody, as far as I know, ever told the Cultural Committee that they were wrong in their assumptions; presumably because the President, in introducing Catherine, had said that he had arranged for someone to come and work for the centre.

The Cultural Committee presumed that whoever came to replace Catherine was their employee, giving them the right to decide what he or she was to do.

Power in the Pacific is manifested in various ways. Ascribed or acquired rank is associated with knowledge and exclusive rights to speak of certain things. It is also manifested by not needing to show itself. In New Caledonia, in particular, the chief is humble, wears no signs of rank, and so will be unknown to strangers: but immediately visible to everyone else. Effective authority is rarely openly voiced.

A corollary of this is, as Perminow (1993:76) remarks for Tonga, "that decision-makers were not expected to

account for their decisions to those 'whose probable pattern of future events' their decisions affected. In a sense, then, their unaccountability is a status marker signalling their position in the hierarchy of authority. Rather mundane information about future projects were guarded as matters of great secrecy and numerous cancellations and sudden changes of plans, involving a show of obedience by the ones whose actions were affected, seemed to play a part in communicating and reinforcing a given hierarchy of authority."

Nobody, then, felt any need to consult either me or Catherine, for we were both in that lowly category of employee/single woman, although cross-cut by the problematic, if more elevated, status of European stranger-guest. My position was worse than Catherine's, for her husband had come to visit her, while I was clearly alone and unmarried. As the prequisite of Kanak adulthood is marriage, followed by children (roughly speaking, the more children you have, the more adult you become), this was enough to put me into the category of teenage girl, and, even worse, pesky adolescent. [Kanak teenagers are expected to keep quiet, work for their keep, obey their elders, and accept a beating if things go seriously wrong.] My competencies were so clearly inferior to those of an adult - people to whom I was introduced would stare at me and immediately ask if it were true that I couldn't drive - that I felt myself permanently regressed to about the age of thirteen: a time when almost every adult I met told me to get on with my work, stop answering back, or asking silly questions.

When, in my case, I failed to show appropriate obedient responses, Rekab displayed towards me all the physical posturing and verbal excitement of a Kanak public political display. In New Caledonia, I think that it was used mainly against whites. But I saw Rekab use the same gestures in Vanuatu, whenever he found himself in front of a non-Kanak audience. [This only dawned on me after I left New Caledonia and was looking through a series of dramatic news photographs, including photographs of Rekab's cousin, Yeiwené Yeiwené, taken during "les événements". Until then, I had classified Rekab's behaviour as exhibitionism, since I was its usual target and he was the only person who ever used it.]

Rekab's posturing had only a limited effect, as I had decided that my best strategy would be to politely ignore it. For Rekab, I must have been the most exasperating guest, for not only did I not conform to his expectations (which were never defined for me), he could not work out what I was doing.

What I was doing was hanging around, following advice to feel my way in, work out relationships, learn the language, before intruding with questions and questionnaires. I knew that if I did this, I would eventually find that I had something to write about. For Rekab, however, whose approach to knowledge always appeared to me to be entirely pragmatic, this was completely incomprehensible. For Rekab, information on daily life was of no obvious interest or value to anyone and my interest in it indicated only my general ignorance and

incompetence; or, possibly, that I was up to no good. Before I left Paris, I had been warned by one of the linguists that Kanaks liked to know what people were doing. But, although I perceived Rekab's behaviour as intrusive, this had not stopped me from telling him who I was (a student from London University) and what I wanted to do. The problem was that Rekab, as I later realized, saw absolutely no reason why my wishes or opinions should be taken into account.

When I left Maré, I told Rekab that I was going to Nouméa but would be back. In Nouméa I became friendly with Alceste, one of Rekab's younger brothers, and his wife Yolande. They had a much more accurate idea of what I was doing, but they seemingly never communicated this to Rekab, with whom Alceste got on badly. While I was in Nouméa, Rekab told people that I was in Cengeite, or England, depending on whom he was speaking to. Yet he must have known where I was. Some Kanaks, who bumped into me at Le Pandanus, expressing surprise at my presence, told me to be very careful with Rekab, because he was related to the President.

I had naively assumed that because the President had wanted someone to go to Maré, and because I had heard in Paris that Jemes did too, they would help me get back. This was a miscalculation. "Culture" was a low political priority for the Kanaks, who were far more interested in health and education than cultural centres, except that if French money were made available for cultural centres, clearly it had to be spent. By getting someone from France to work for the cultural centre,

the Kanaks could attend to more important things. But if that went wrong, no one was going to risk antagonising Rekab, with his capacity for stirring up trouble, for the sake of some transient outsider of no perceptible benefit to the community. Guy had told me that I would have to fight for myself: I understood this to mean that I should stand up to Emmanuel and the Cultural Committee. But what he really meant was that I could expect no help from anyone.

Except for individuals who live outside or are estranged in some way from the tribal world, Kanak relationships with non-Kanaks tend towards utilitarianism. There is little attempt to maintain friendship as understood by Europeans: as if, Vivier remarks, all whites were interchangeable (Vivier 1992: 10,12; Tristan 1990:24). In Maré, when I noticed an unusually modern and expensive looking roadside house, I asked Rekab to whom it belonged. Nobody important, he barked, a white. : "Personne d'importance, un blanc." I noticed how an innocuous young white couple turned up at a village fête and were deliberately ignored by all present. I was struck by the way a polite, middle-aged, Frenchman, driving through Gileada, stopped to greet Jese and Esetera, who were sitting in their garden. To my surprise, he was cold-shouldered, offered neither tea nor coffee, as they waited for him to go. When I asked who he was, I was curtly informed that he was married to their cousin. In both these cases, I noticed how hard the whites tried to be polite, how quickly they were snubbed. [Similar things happened to me, on several occasions.] It is, of course, entirely possible that these responses were caused by

unknown personal factors. But it seems to me that Golden, quoted in Fischer's discussion of the American civil rights movement (1986:196), sums it up exactly:

"The black students did not know that in a few months many of us would repudiate our white friends, no longer finding them 'relevant'. Finding instead their mere presence inconsistent with a 'commitment to the struggle', which is what our lives became overnight."

In other words, individual Europeans are irrelevant to the Kanaks' struggle for social and economic justice, and independence.

My request for help had, of course, put the President in an impossible position: for how could he tell the Cultural Committee that their assumptions had been wrong? Decisions in Kanak society are reached through endless meetings, until every member of the group agrees. Subordinate individuals are supposed to go along with what has been collectively decided. There is no mechanism for backtracking if it turns out that the group's decisions were based on wrong information, or if one of the group's members changes his or her mind after agreement has been reached. But at the time, I failed to see this.

It is impossible for me to say whether the actions I took were ill-advised or not, or whether any other approach would have been more productive. When I left New Caledonia, I discovered that everyone I met had assumed that, if I had

difficulties in Maré, I would just go elsewhere. Eventually I would get the message, and leave. This did not happen, partly because I knew too little of Kanak society to see the nature of the problem.

Yet I cannot say that my approach was wrong. Suppose I had gone to stay with "Patate"? Suppose I had gone to live with Mariette's or some other family and exposed them to the possible wrath of the Cultural Committee? Suppose I had complained to the high chief Naisseline, Rekab's chief but the President's political rival? Suppose, as one hosteller advised, I had gone to the gendarmerie, complained of assault, and agreed to withdraw the complaint only if some solution were reached? I assume that things would have got worse. But although I had picked up on enough antagonisms, undercurrents of violence, to be genuinely frightened, I knew also that, as in other Pacific societies, these were partly done for effect, and contained some elements of bluff. I have no idea what might have happened.

Writing Up

Whenever I think about what I should write, or have written, in this thesis my feelings plunge into turmoil. For a start, what would my informants like me to have written? This is an unanswerable question.

Essentially, this thesis has been written for two reasons. First, I am the only one who could write it, because my experiences were in some ways common and in some

unique, and I hope that it will be interesting and useful to anthropologists in particular, and the world in general. Second, I received funding to write it and so had an obligation towards my sponsors and myself.

I have described two different social worlds, that of the settled rural Kanaks of Maré, and the temporary urban existence of the Nouméan hostellers. Different problems are associated with writing about each group, as I was the only link between them.

To take the hostellers first, I usually had an easier rapport with them than with the Kanaks, although this varied according to circumstances. As stated earlier, the hostellers divided into two broad overlapping groups, travellers and workers. The chapters dealing with them can be seen as contributions to the sociologies of leisure, travel, and work. Directly or indirectly, the hostellers were usually confronting the same problem, unemployment, and, in doing so, were resourceful, tough and brave.

The reasons for youth and adult unemployment in France and elsewhere lie outside the scope of this thesis [1]. As a general rule, however, it can be stated that the younger and more inexperienced a person, the less chance he or she has of

1 Figures published by the International Labour Organization Year Book of Labour Statistics (1994: 503,523), then calculated in percentages, indicate that total unemployment in France for 1989,1991, and 1993, was running at 9.4%, 9.4%, and 11.6% respectively. Of these total unemployment figures, roughly 24.5%, 22%, and 21% related to young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four; and of these total unemployment figures, between 10% and 11% of those seeking work had no previous job experience (presumably there is some correlation between age, and job experience).

finding permanent and satisfying work; and, possibly, the more tempted he or she would be to either travel and or seek suitable work abroad.

The hostellers were examples of this new, international transmigration of labour, following the increase in job insecurity in Europe. It is often argued that now, in the nineteen-nineties, the middle-classes of Western Europe are being proletarianized into "multiskilled" near-casual labourers; and that this is evinced by the way in which "educated" people deliberately adopt "popular culture" and demotic speech (although this is a trend that has been continuing for many years, and shows no direct correlation with the job market). The hostellers, were often, but not exclusively, from relatively comfortable, educated, as opposed to truly impoverished, uneducated, family backgrounds but were (temporarily?) poor, and participating in a popular youth culture. This common youth culture, however, did not prevent them from taking life seriously. Most of the workers were worried about their futures.

New Caledonia, however, was a small place torn by antagonisms, politically uncertain and with few opportunities for work. Labour legislation was less strict than in France, which might have improved people's chances, but jobs were scarce and expatriate workers bitterly resented. The cost of living was high, so people ran out of money.

The harsh realities of New Caledonia frequently shocked

and disillusioned both the workers, and the travellers, who were earning, or hoping to earn, money to live on and then move elsewhere. Their stories showed the difficulties faced by travellers and by migrant workers and the dangers awaiting the unwary. Unlike the Kanaks, the hostellers were not involved in political struggle and their representation cannot be seen as affecting their status as a group. They were transients living in a semi-public place, not easily identifiable as individuals except to those who knew them well.

With the depiction of the Kanaks, other concerns come into play, including some of those traditionally associated with the ethnography of small-scale societies. To return to the original question, what should I have written and what would they have liked me to write?

There are many ways in which the anthropologist can approach this dilemma and there is no answer which applies in all circumstances - rather any answer is for the individual to uphold as he or she sees fit. It is often argued that anthropologists are there to provide cultural resources for "their" people, to somehow become their advocates and be the voice of the oppressed. This is simultaneously a form of Western intellectual paternalism and a realistic outlook which states that all peoples are to a lesser or greater extent members of the world system, linked into global markets that trade not just commodities but also concepts and knowledge. It also implies that Western ideas and lifestyles are dominant and will gradually displace or meld with others. In other

words, anthropologists must act on behalf of the dominated because anthropologists are assumed to have a greater sophistication and understanding of the system and its institutions and its likely impact on the groups they study.

To my mind, neither the provision of cultural resources, nor the call to social action, should be seen as professionally binding. The real problem is one of different concepts and priorities: that what the anthropologist thinks is an interesting and scientific study contributing to the world's store of knowledge, may not be seen by his or her informants in the same light and may well be regarded as banal, intrusive and useless.

In writing this thesis I am sure that my Kanak, French, and other friends and hosts will feel that I have given a rude and ungracious response to their kindness and hospitality, that I have somehow deceived and betrayed them by what I have written. Kanak society views knowledge as an object of exchange, whose value comes from its utility and immediacy of application. Those Kanaks whose education goes beyond a basic level have imbued French concerns with self-presentation and representation, with putting one's best face forward.

This is particularly important in New Caledonia, where struggles for identity and its public recognition permeate every aspect of political life and representation, by groups for and against independence, ranging from the Caldoches to the

Pacific Islanders to the Kanaks. Having heard the strictures passed on a French filmmaker who allowed a minuscule amount of photo-realism into his documentary on the Kanaks - by showing one of his characters stopping by the windows of a bar, to wave a greeting to friends inside - I am well aware of how even minimal frankness may be rejected by Kanaks wishing to preserve and present the dignity of their culture. The French anthropologists whom I have encountered and read make every effort not to appear publicly critical of anything Kanak. That I have done so is partly because my experiences were not the same as theirs, and partly because I come from a different background and different intellectual tradition. I realize that the process of analysis, of distancing and reduction to spectacle, is itself seen as slightly odd and insulting by the Kanaks and others who are engaged in political and social struggle and desire solidarity with their cause. For them, a thesis such as this serves no useful purpose and is not really a fair exchange for the information and access they gave me.

How, and to what extent, one presents problems in the portrayal of societies other than one's own is an individual decision and not one for which there is or could be any agreed professional standard. Knowledge, as I stated earlier, is not legitimated solely by its origin or methodology but also by its use and interpretation. What my sponsors, or the Kanaks, or specifically some Kanaks, might have wished me to write about Maré, is irrelevant, as circumstances prevented any agreements from being reached. The same applies to my

writing about the hostel and its inhabitants. This is not to say that I reject any responsibility towards people who were kind and helpful towards me or claim that writing is a morally neutral act. Knowledge and power are inextricable, as the Kanaks recognize; and access to knowledge and information systems are unequally and inequitably distributed among and within societies. However good the original intentions, the more those with power can access information about others, the more research intrudes into people's privacy, the more people's niches of resistance are destroyed. On the other hand, knowledge can be used benevolently and is an inheritance for the future as well as a tool for the present.

Initially, the fault was mine. This was not because I behaved inappropriately, which was inevitable. It was because in formulating and conceiving my research proposal I had failed to consider the Kanaks as other than material for my thesis. This was a society where knowledge was precious and strangers seen as threats. If people wanted to control who came to their island, and dictate how they behaved, they had a perfect right to do so. Why be exposed to the intrusive eyes of strangers simply because they claim that the whole of mankind will benefit from their books?

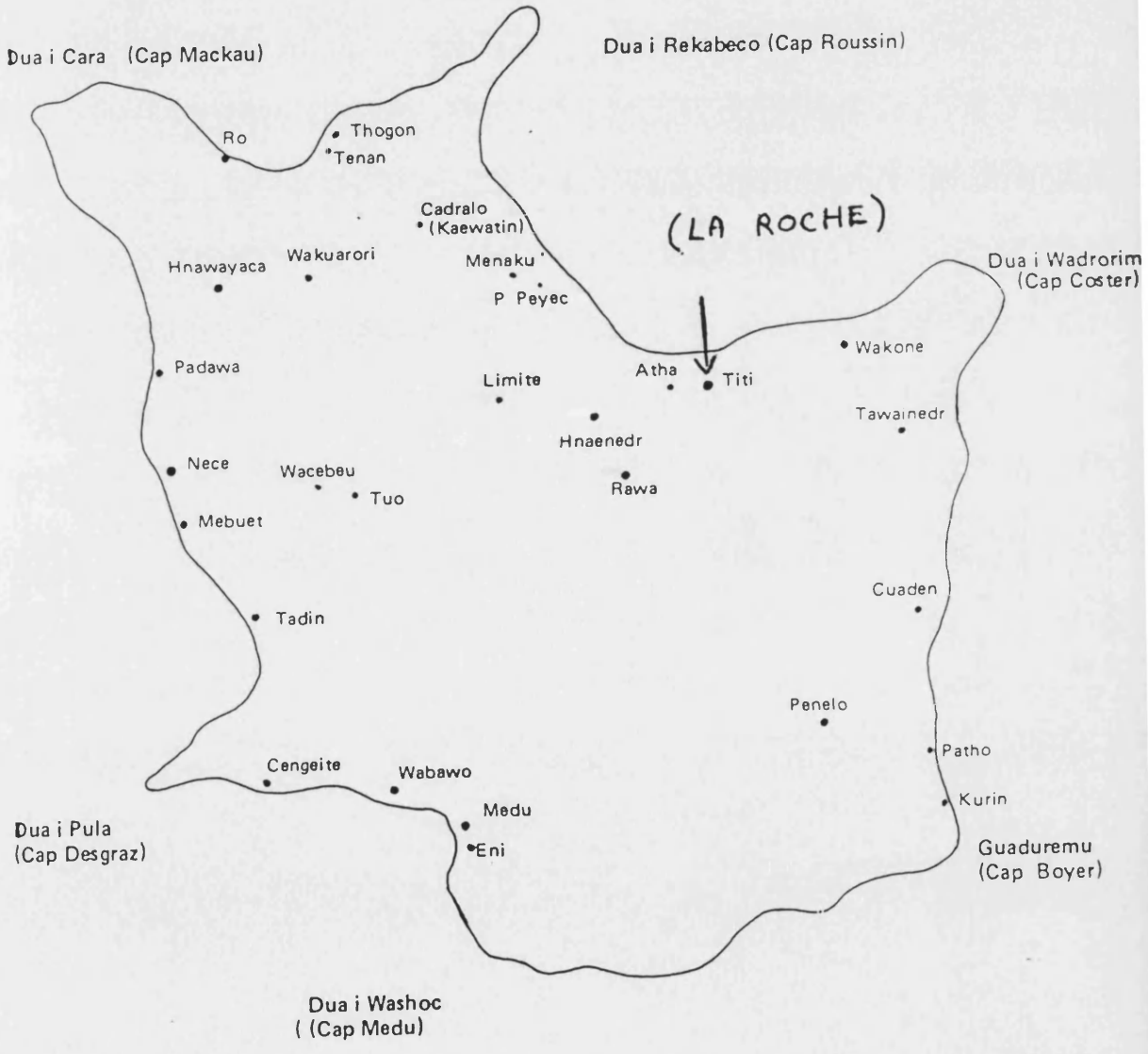
But for me, I was left with a choice between writing like this or not at all. Given these conflicting choices and responsibilities, I decided to write.

I certainly outstayed my welcome, and was a terrible

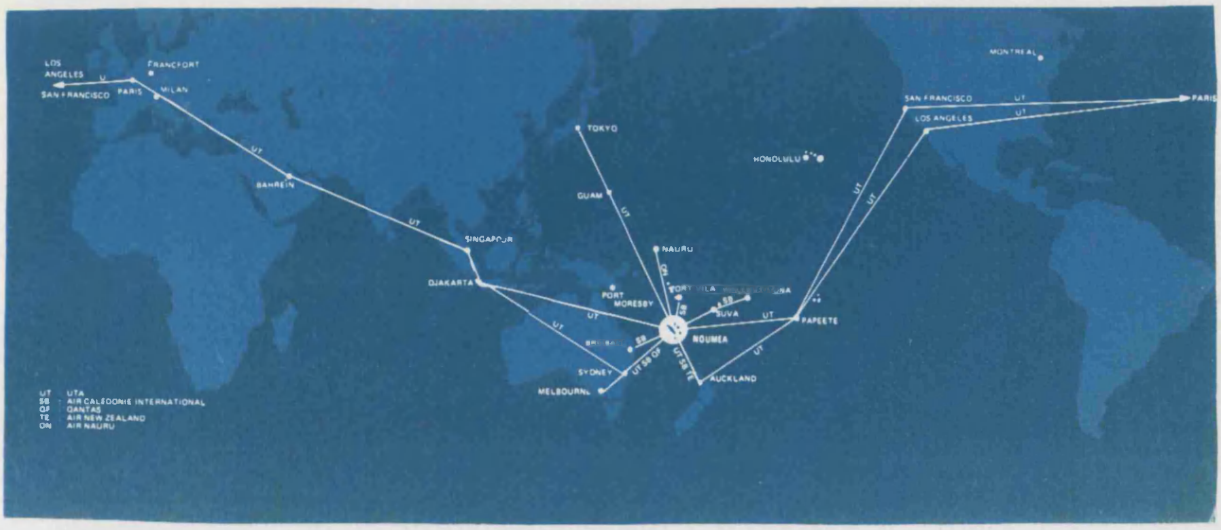
nuisance to many people, but, overall, I was tolerated, politely and kindly treated. Although I found that the restrictions of status and gender made Kanak life difficult for me to enter into, I have nothing but admiration for what I saw of the hospitality and many other virtues of the Kanak people.

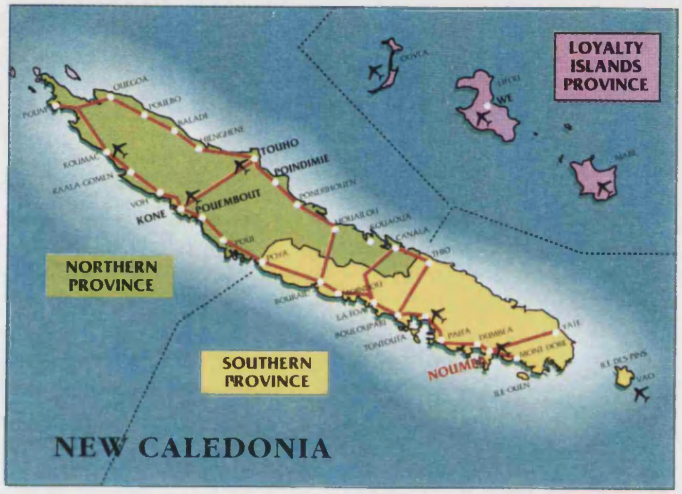
LINGUISTIC MAP OF NEW CALEDONIA
AND THE LOYALTY ISLANDS, TAKEN FROM CAWA AND
HAEWEGENE (1985)

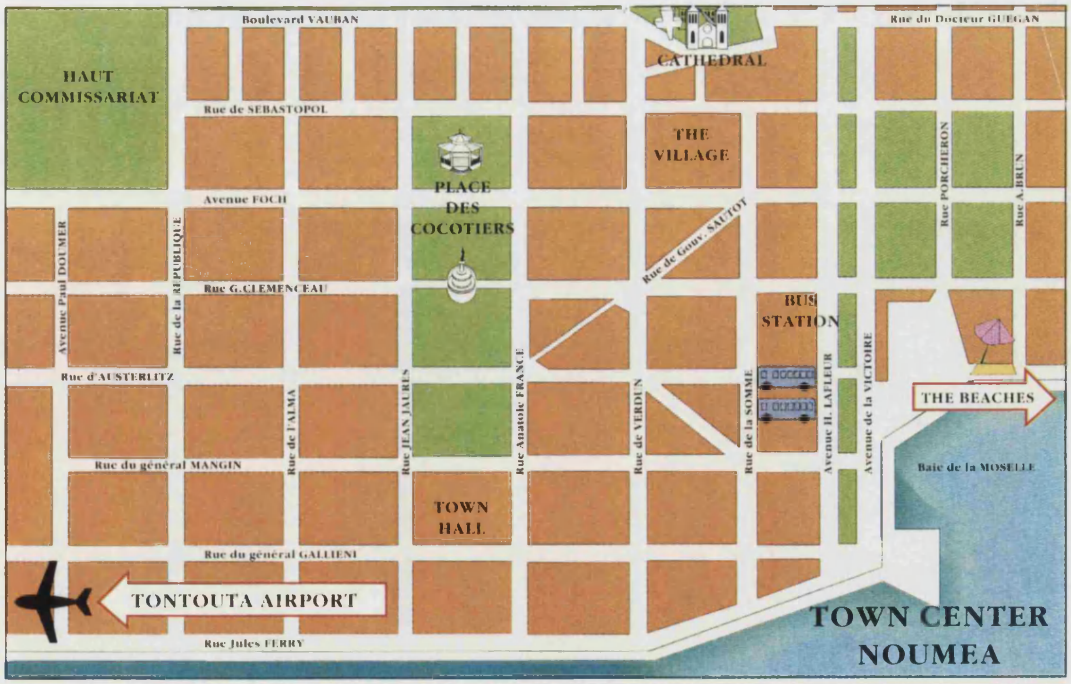
MAP OF MARÉ AND ITS TRIBAL VILLAGES,
TAKEN FROM CAWA AND HAEWEGENE (1985),
AMENDED BY MARGARET TAYLOR



MAPS OF NEW CALEDONIA AND NOUMEA







Taken from"Hello New Caledonia" 1991 and other tourist brochures.

LIFE IN MARE

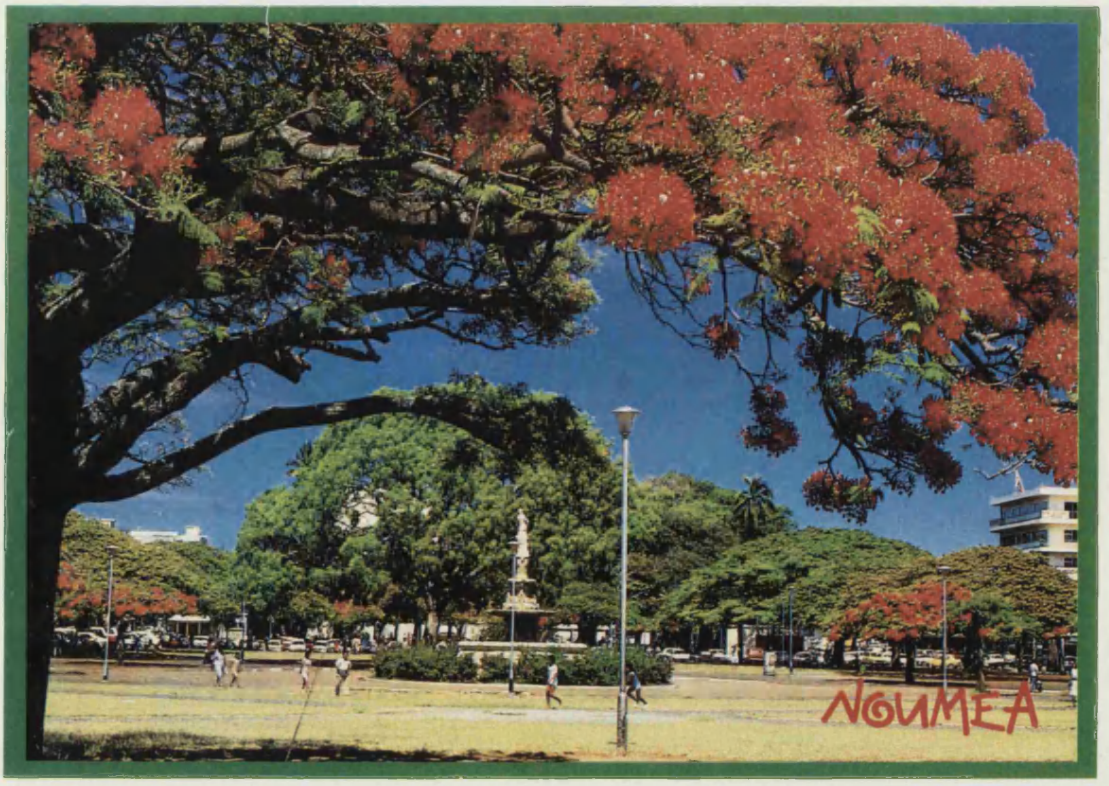
Maré 1991: Kanak family and friends in front of their hut, one of the several buildings that make up the home of what is usually a large family.
(Photograph: Margaret Taylor)

Maré 1991: Kanak women dancing and processing at a feast, wearing the typical everyday dress, the "robe de popinée".
(Photograph: Margaret Taylor.)

THE CALEDONIAN IDYLL

Tonton Marcel is with his friends in "la brousse". Note the "chinois" (Vietnamese) shop-keeper, the bottle of gas for the stove, Tonton Marcel's hat and "claquettes", typical of the "broussard". Postcard by Bernard Berger.

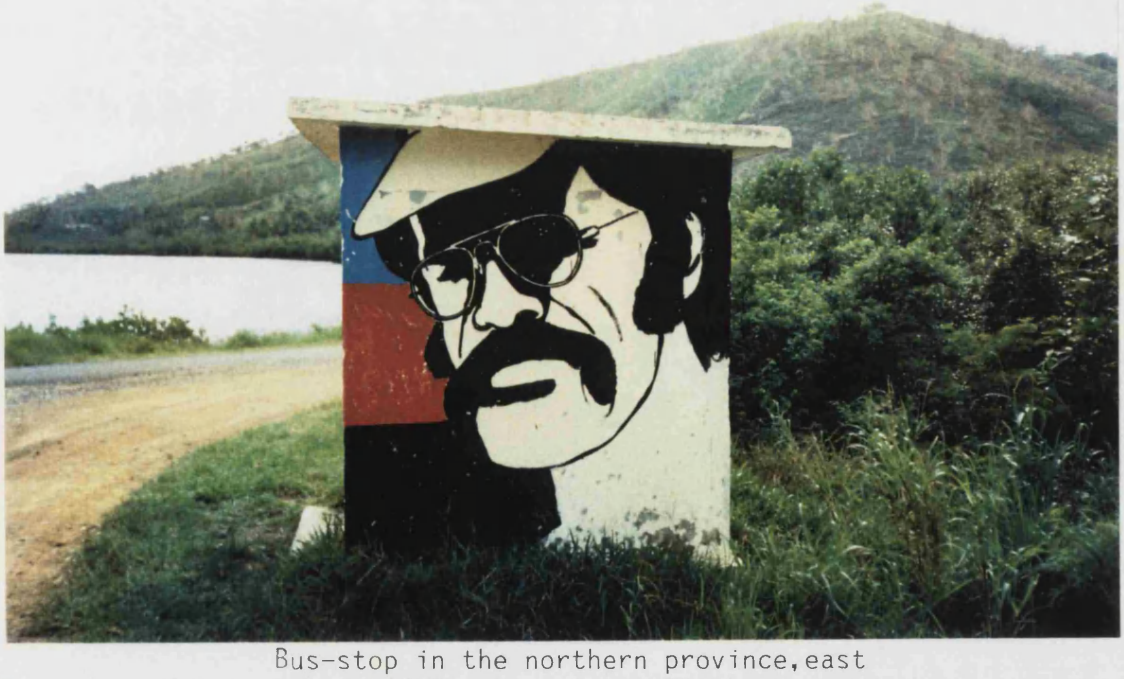
NOUMEA LA BLANCHE



Place des Cocotiers, Nouméa.

Postcard Editions Solaris.

Bus-stop in the northern province, east coast, 1992: the outer wall portrays Atai, leader of the 1878 rebellion. The inner wall shows Jean-Marie Tjibaou, standing next to a traditional Kanak warrior.
(Photograph: Margaret Taylor)



Bus-stop in the northern province, east coast, 1992: the outer wall shows Eloi Machoro.
(Photograph: Margaret Taylor)

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